

THE DANGER

And other Tales

Stephen Taltents





D. New  
1818.

Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2007 with funding from  
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/thedancer00talliala>

R. Elvis Roberts.



THE DANCER  
AND OTHER TALES

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

# THE STARRY POOL AND OTHER TALES

**Westminster Gazette :**

"A class of literature which gives an intimate picture of the writer himself, who in this particular case endears himself to the reader by his humour, which is never cynical, and by his zest for the simple, which is never forced. . . It is certain that the volume will find, as it deserves, very many friends. Its picture of so much ordinary human life and happiness makes it the most cheerful of reading."

**Morning Post :**

"In these stories a poet enlarges himself from the story form. They rustle up from earth like a lark, before mounting in song, at once wistful and aspiring."

**CLEMENT SHORTER in the Sphere :**

"Mixture of fantasy and reality makes entrancing reading. Any parent, be it father or mother, will love to read these little stories to one another, and some of them to the children."

**Spectator :**

"These sketches are concerned with the intimate private life of a discharged officer with his wife and babies. There is a great deal of delightful reading in them, and the first person singular who tells the stories is possessed of a charming fancy and of much literary ability."

**New Statesman :**

"There is in them all a spirit of courage and cheerfulness, a passion for beauty and truth."

**Challenge :**

"Singularly fresh and beautiful. A book which the discerning reader will place in the row that contains Lamb."

CONSTABLE AND CO. LTD.

A 55869

# THE DANCER

## AND OTHER TALES

BY

STEPHEN TALLENTS

CONSTABLE & COMPANY LIMITED  
LONDON BOMBAY SYDNEY

1922



TO  
PERSIS



## CONTENTS

	<small>PAGE</small>
THE DANCER . . . . .	13
MIRANDA . . . . .	30
THE ORDERLY ROOM . . . . .	66
A CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER . . . . .	82
THE SILVER CUP . . . . .	96
THE DARK . . . . .	107
THE GAY MORNING . . . . .	115
THE NURSERY FIRE . . . . .	127
THE PROCESSION . . . . .	130
THE LITTLE MAN . . . . .	133
THE DESERTED NURSERY . . . . .	139
GREATHEART . . . . .	142
HEROES . . . . .	146
THE STORM . . . . .	151
THE GLIMPSE . . . . .	154
THE NIGHT OF ST. JOHN . . . . .	158
THE BALTIC SEA . . . . .	161
AN ENGLISH SPRING . . . . .	164
A SUMMER'S MEMORIAL . . . . .	168



“THE Dancer” and “The Orderly Room” appeared first in the *Cornhill Magazine*, and “The Nursery Fire,” with all the tales that here follow it, except “The Little Man,” in the *Manchester Guardian*. “The Little Man” was first published in *Maternity and Child Welfare*.

The author’s thanks are due to the editors for permission to reprint.

STEPHEN TALLENTS

LONDON,

*April, 1922.*



# The Dancer and Other Tales

## THE DANCER

### I

IT was nearly midnight, and three men were sitting in a room at the top of a house in Adelphi Terrace, smoking, after the theatre. One of them, dressed in plain clothes, sat in the window-seat, his profile dark against the sky. The other two sat in arm-chairs on each side of a small table, on which a heavily shaded reading lamp threw a circle of light about a tray of glasses and decanters. Each was in uniform, and one of them, Ivan Fitzgerald, wore the red tabs of a staff-officer.

“I liked that funny man,” said the other, Tom Cameron ; “he’s a first-class fellow.”

Ivan nodded, his pipe between his lips.

“Delia wasn’t bad,” Tom went on, “but she’s nothing to what she was in that last piece of hers. I used to go and see her once a week regularly. But I wonder why she always makes herself such a guy in a black dress whenever she dances now.”

Ivan laid his head back and blew a ring which drifted sideways across the pale square of the window.

“Did either of you fellows know Philip Hazleton ? ” said Oliver Dane, still watching the London sky from his window-seat.

“Yes,” said Ivan, putting his pipe back between his

## 14 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

teeth. "He was up at Oxford with me. You remember him, Tom, surely. That very quiet fellow at New College. He never did anything special up there, but I should have thought you'd have known him. One used to see him dining at the Club sometimes our last year. He took Greats the same year as I did, and I used to meet him at lectures sometimes."

"Oh, I remember him," said Tom; "an awful quiet fellow."

"He and I went out with a draft together," said Oliver, "about the end of 1914. We'd been with the reserve battalion about a couple of months, without coming across each other much. But we marched up from the railhead together that night, and I got to know him quite well. I remember getting out of the train and finding the station yard full of ambulances and stretchers. The Huns had started shelling some hospital or other, and they'd had to move at short notice. There was a poor devil lying on the ground just by our carriage door—a stretcher case. It was rather a grisly introduction to the front—made us both feel rather homesick, I think—and Philip opened out to me as we marched our draft up. It's curious the things that stick in one's mind. It was starry and the roads were stiff with frost. I remember coming suddenly on a horse's grave just outside a village—a white heap of lime by the wayside. And then one saw the flares lifting and sinking in the distance, and Philip began to tell me how he'd spent his last day at home fishing.

"We found the battalion in a dirty little village somewhere near Bethune, and spent a couple of days there with nothing to do except to march one's platoon about a muddy field. Everyone else had been in trenches already, and Philip and I felt like a pair of new boys, gone to school for the first time and wondering how we should get through it all. We weren't allowed far

from billets, but we used to go for short, weary walks together to get away from the company mess for a bit. And then the battalion went up into the line. The whole brigade marched down through Bethune, and I remember looking back and seeing the old church tower standing out against a scarlet sunset. And then we were halted somewhere behind Cuinchy, and I was sitting next to Philip on a stubble field when I heard my first bullet go by.

"We didn't get into trenches until quite late—nearly midnight. My platoon was in support, just behind the firing line ; and after a bit Philip, whose company was next mine, came and sat down with me in a hollow of the trench. It was a very lively spot just then—rapid fire on and off all night long. And quite soon we heard that the battalion in front of us on our left had had a post rushed. Evelyn Moore came along and told us about it, and said very likely we should be sent in to push the Huns out again. He told us that a man who had come out in the same boat with us had been killed when the post was rushed, and that brought things home to us rather. Somehow we hadn't expected to be killed our first night in the line.

"'What's the last thing you remember of peace ? ' Philip said to me suddenly.

"I think I talked about a walk I'd had all along the edge of the Cotswolds.

"'The last thing I remember was a dance,' said Philip. He'd been dining, he said, in Belgrave Square and had found himself stranded, as one sometimes does at dinner—both the girls next him talking to their other neighbours. Opposite him there was a girl in a grey dress. Very slight, he said, she was and rather pale, with a mass of brown hair with gold in it bound back on either side of her forehead. Philip had seen her once or twice at dances, though he didn't think she frequented them

## 16 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

regularly, and he'd always been a little puzzled by a sort of aloofness there was about her. Just then, he said, there was a flicker of amusement in her face, as she sat there, like himself, deserted by her neighbours. And then their eyes met, and a gleam of laughter, the lightest shadow of friendliness, fell across the table between them before she looked away.

“ In the motor going on to the dance Philip asked who she was. ‘ Miss Earle,’ said his hostess. ‘ Haven’t you ever met her ? ’

“ ‘ I don’t think so,’ said Philip.

“ His hostess didn’t think she went out much. Her mother was dead and she stayed at home a good deal to look after her father. She was a wonderful dancer, and at one time there had been an idea of her going in for it professionally. But she was supposed to have given that up now that she was getting older and wiser.

“ The dance was in Grosvenor Square. It was extraordinary, sitting in that frozen trench, to hear Philip describing the house all filled with roses, with red ramblers in pots standing at every corner of the staircase and a basket full of them over the landing at the head of the stairs. It was a very crowded dance, and for some time he couldn’t catch the girl in grey. But at last, he said, she passed him in the doorway, going to sit a dance out. He asked her for a dance, and she smiled and assented ; and he asked her for another, and she made him a little mocking bow. And finally they agreed to dance two running.

“ When his first dance with her came round, Philip was waiting for her. There was a semblance of space for dancing at that moment and he wished that she’d been there, ready for a moment’s dancing before the crowd filled the room again. But couple after couple came through the doors, and the space was absorbed by

men and girls jostling and watching for their partners. And she didn't appear till dancing was out of the question.

"' Do you think it any good trying to dance ? ' said Philip.

"' None,' said she. ' I want you to take me for some fresh air, will you ? '

"' I should love to,' Philip said. So they gradually forced their way down to the hall and out into the street.

" They walked to the corner of the square in silence ; and there the girl stood for a moment, lifting her face to the deep blue London sky.

"' What an escape ! ' she said.

"' Don't you like dances either ? ' said Philip.

"' I love dancing,' she said, ' but not that,' showing with a sweep of her arm the house they had just come from.

"' Somebody told me you were going to be a professional dancer,' said Philip.

"' Ah,' said she, ' if only I could ! '

"' Why not ? ' said he. ' I'm sure you've got the heart of it in you.'

"' What makes you think that ? ' she said, looking at him to see whether he was mocking at her.

"' My bones within me said it when I caught your eye at dinner.'

" By now, Philip said, they were at the corner of Upper Grosvenor Street and Park Lane. The girl turned to him, and put her head on one side and said :

"' Would you like to see me dance ? '

"' Very much,' said Philip.

"' Honour bright ? ' said she.

"' Honour bright.'

" She stood looking at him for a moment, as though to make certain that he meant what he said.

## 18 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

“ ‘ You’re sure you won’t be ashamed of me ? ’

“ ‘ Nonsense,’ said Philip.

“ The girl held up her dress and made him a deep curtsey. Then she began to dance upon the open pavement while Philip leaned back against a railing and watched her.

“ He could never tell himself afterwards, he said, what the dance had been. With any other girl that he could think of it must have been a fiasco. But with her it was impossible to do anything but watch. At one moment she seemed to be dancing a story. She came towards him and retreated and swung to right and left. And then her fancy seemed to break away from the story, and she was dancing like a child in sheer merriment and gaiety. The passengers on a late bus hustling down Park Lane looked on amazed. A policeman on the other side of the road seemed doubtful if it was his duty to stop her. To and fro she went, swaying in rhythmic gesture, her whole body alive with vivid, throbbing movement. Then the rhythm of her dancing quickened. Her feet flickered like shadows on the pavement. And still the measure quickened ; until, with the stamp of a grey heel on the pavement, she stopped defiantly a yard in front of him and the dance was ended.

“ ‘ Bravo,’ said Philip, ‘ bravo ! ’

“ ‘ I never dance,’ said she, as though evading his compliment, ‘ except for my friends. I want to count you among my friends. May I ? ’

“ ‘ It’s an honour to be elected,’ said Philip.

“ ‘ Now we must go back,’ said she.

“ ‘ Oh ! ’ said Philip disappointed. ‘ I do like you for doing that,’ he said.

“ ‘ You aren’t shocked ? ’ she asked him. ‘ When I meet people I want to be friends with, I always want to be friends quickly. And because my dancing’s the best thing about me, I like to dance for them.’

"At that they turned and walked side by side back towards the square. The girl put her hand lightly on his arm.

"Promise to dance again for me when next we meet,' said Philip.

"*Over hill, over dale,*'

she chanted lightly,

"*Through bush, through brier,*—

And who can tell which it may be? You see, I'm working to be a professional. But father doesn't like the idea and he has expected me to stay at home a good deal since my mother died. You won't find me often at dances. But when we meet again, yes, I'll dance for you, surely.'

"I shall keep you to your promise,' said Philip. 'I shall come up to you, wherever I find you, and I shall say—"Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?" and you, like Rosaline, must answer—"Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?" and then and there you must dance for me.'

"By now they were back at the house, where the ball was being held. The opening bars of a valse were creeping out through the windows. In the distance a clock struck one.

"Ding dong bell,' said she. 'Playtime's ended.'

"Philip said she stood for a moment at the top of the steps and gave him her hand rather shyly. And then, almost before he could take it, she drew it away and they were mounting the stairs together demurely and another partner had caught her and she was gone."

Oliver Dane got up from the window-seat and came across and took a cigarette from the table and lit it.

## 20 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

" Philip made the whole thing awfully vivid to me," he said, half apologetically, " and I've never forgotten it. But it's rather difficult to tell a story second-hand."

He sat down again by the window, and the glow of the cigarette lit up his face as he leaned back against the arm of the window-seat.

## II

“ I’m off,” said Tom. “ Are you coming my way, Ivan ? It’s awfully late. I should have bolted before, only I thought Oliver was going to explain why Delia always dances nowadays in black, curse her. Isn’t there enough black in London without having to go to a music-hall to see it ? ”

Ivan, sitting in the arm-chair on the other side of the table, didn’t move.

“ He was killed afterwards, wasn’t he, Oliver ? ” he said.

“ Yes,” said Oliver. “ I was going to tell you about it.”

Tom, on his way to pick up his cap and belt from a side table, stopped and turned round. He looked puzzled.

“ Are you going to explain why Delia dances in black or are you not ? ” he said.

“ Wait and hear,” said Ivan. “ I’ll give you a lift home afterwards. My mother said she’d send the car for me.”

Tom put back his belt and sat down again a little impatiently in his chair, fidgeting with his cap upon his knees. Ivan poured out a drink for himself and Tom turned out the lamp and lit a cigarette.

“ Go on, Oliver,” he said.

Oliver came across to the table again and slowly poured himself out a whisky and soda. Then he returned to his seat by the window, and for a few moments there was silence in the room.

“ I didn’t see very much of Philip that winter. He went to a different company directly we came out of trenches, and I didn’t know any of the fellows in his

## 22 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

mess well. But about May he went home on a week's leave, and, when he came back, the battalion was in rest at Bethune and all the companies were messing together. Coming back from leave's always far worse than going out for the first time, and I could see that Philip was simply miserable. He was happier when he got back into trenches again, and he seemed to be more confident too. His first month out at the front, he said, he really hadn't an idea of what went on the other side of our wire. But now he used to volunteer constantly for patrol work and spend half the night out between the lines. He told me once that it all came from a night when he had been sent out to clear up a derelict trench that joined on to one of our saps. His company had to occupy it the next morning, while another battalion did an attack on the left. That night's work, he said, showed him how little danger there was in going out at night ; and it gave him a taste for the excitement of night work too. But I don't think that altogether accounted for the change. He was always at his best up in the line—seemed to forget himself altogether. Back in billets he was restless and rather morose sometimes. I saw a lot of him about then. He took to me, I think. I don't know why. I was younger than he was, of course ; and you know what a difference a few years make when one's fresh down from the 'Varsity. But that may have been a reason for it. In some ways he himself was rather like a child puzzled by the war and the life we were leading out there. Any-way he always seemed to like talking to me. But he never talked very freely until the night before he died.

" We were somewhere up behind Richebourg that night and Philip's company was for it just before dawn. The ruins of a farm in front of our line had to be taken—I've forgotten its name now. He and I were sitting together over a brazier and thinking, as everyone thinks on such nights, of home.

“ ‘ Do you remember the girl I told you about that night at Cuinchy ? ’ said Philip suddenly to me.

“ ‘ Yes,’ I said.

“ ‘ I met her again when I was back on leave last month,’ said he.

“ I said nothing, and waited for him to tell me more if he felt inclined. The light of the brazier lit up his face dimly, and I could see that he was wrestling with his memories and wondering whether to set them free.

“ ‘ I wrote to her,’ he said at last, ‘ as soon as I got back to London, and I heard from her. Her father, she said, had got some job or other behind the line out here, and she had been left free at last to devote herself to dancing. She and I dined together one evening, and as I was seeing her home, “ Are you going to dance for me,” I said, “ before I go back to France ? ” ’

“ ‘ I’d love to,’ said she, “ only my piece won’t have started properly before you go back. But we’ve got a rehearsal on Friday. If you’d like to come to that, I’ll dance you a farewell.” ’

“ ‘ Friday,’ said Philip, ‘ was my last night in England, and I told her indeed I would come.’

“ He dined alone, he said, in some little Soho restaurant, and after dinner he strolled round to the stage door of the theatre. He’d never been to a rehearsal before, and sitting there in the trench, with an hour at least to go before he had to be ready to start, he gave me a minute account of what had happened.

“ There was a taxi waiting outside the door, and a small group of men with cigarettes in their mouths were waiting to go in for their evening’s work. A chorus girl was gossiping with a soldier. Philip went through the door and gave his name to the doorkeeper sitting by the entrance. The man had orders, he said, to let him in, and led him across a corner of the stage and told him to sit down anywhere he liked in the stalls.

## 24 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

“ He pulled aside the covering from a seat near the centre gangway, sat down and looked about him. There were a few people sitting in the stalls on his left, and he could see some girls laughing and talking in one of the boxes.

“ On the stage men in shirt sleeves were laboriously drawing up a wooden boat with a painted sail. On the right others were setting the front of an inn, and there was a hitch over the chestnut tree which was supposed to stand over it. One branch had caught across another, and a man was calling to have it raised and lowered again. In front a boy was laying out the sheet of a new lyric for the orchestra.

“ Gradually other men came into the theatre. The producer appeared on the stage and gave some directions in a loud voice. A man, who appeared to be the manager, came and sat in the stalls in front of him. Others came round him, taking directions from him or discussing the changes which had to be made at the last moment in the revue. The musicians came up, one by one, into the orchestra. Then a scene was played. The leading lady, singing hardly above a whisper for the sake of resting her voice, moved to and fro in time to the music, while the chorus danced in support of her. Several times she stopped the orchestra to have some point in the scene changed or to repeat the movement of a dance until the chorus were in accord. A man on Philip’s left sat with a watch in his hand, recording how long each part of the performance was going to take.

“ The scene ended and a comedian in plain clothes came on for the next. The leading lady came round from the stage to discuss the piece with the manager. Her dresser sat holding a glass in front of her while she plaited her hair afresh, talking and laughing merrily while her fingers moved. Girls from the chorus came and sat in rows on Philip’s left, putting up their feet on

the seats in front of them. Then Philip heard a voice behind him say :

“ ‘ Did not I dance with you in Brabant once ? ’ Philip made room for her beside him, and she sat down. She was wearing a cloak, but he had glimpses of a silver dancing dress beneath it.

“ ‘ I wish you weren’t going back to-morrow,’ she said. ‘ But I don’t know, really. There’s only one place for men at present, and that’s with the infantry in France. It’s harder for women to choose. Sometimes I wonder if I ought to have gone for a nurse. I nearly went and worked at munitions once. But at the last moment it seemed better to stick to dancing. I can dance, and I’m not sure I can do anything else half so well. At first I thought the war was going to take all the joy out of dancing. But somehow it hasn’t. It’s shaken off many of the old chains. And it’s put me on my mettle. Here’s death challenging us all, and dancing’s my defiance. So while there’s room and time for dancing——’ ”

“ She threw her hands apart with an expressive gesture.

“ ‘ Good,’ said Philip.

“ ‘ I asked you to come to-night,’ she said, ‘ because dancing was the best farewell I could give you. We often play, you know, at rehearsal, but to-night I’m going to dance really and truly. I shan’t say good-bye to you first, and I shan’t come and say good-bye to you afterwards. There’s nothing left of me when I’ve finished dancing. Besides, I can’t say things as well as I can dance them. You’ll understand, won’t you ? ’ ”

“ Philip nodded. She spoke, he said, of her dancing almost reverently, as though it were a thing apart and greater than herself. He understood ; but before he could answer——

“ ‘ Let’s have Miss Earle’s dance next,’ he heard the manager say in front of him. ‘ Are you there, Miss Earle ? ’ he called out, looking round for her.

## 26 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

“ She put her hand on Philip’s for a moment as she passed him. He glanced up at her. She had the same whimsical, understanding look on her face that he had intercepted once across a dinner-table in Grosvenor Square. Only to-night the excitement of her coming dance shone through it, and, as she went forward to speak to the manager, the gold gleamed in the mass of her hair.

“ The conductor joined her for a moment, and she seemed from the gesture of her hands to be giving him instructions about the music for her dance. Then she went quickly along a line of stalls and disappeared at the back of the boxes.

“ The orchestra turned over her music. The conductor gave them a few instructions. She came on to the stage from the left, up to the footlights, and putting her arms across her face to shade her eyes from their glare, and speaking to the conductor :

“ ‘ Real dancing to-night,’ she warned him.

“ I don’t know how to convey to you properly the description Philip gave me of that last dance of hers. He himself couldn’t get the words he wanted, though he forgot everything else while he was talking to me—‘ like a dying man to dying men,’ I remember thinking. And it’s bound to sound cold and formal at second-hand. But it was clear what an extraordinary impression her dance had made on him. You can’t tell what a man’s anchors are till he’s up against death, and I doubt if Philip had ever been anchored properly to anything. A man looking for anchorage—that was one of the first impressions I had of him. But it was amazing the effect this girl’s dancing had had. I should have laughed if I’d heard the story from anyone else’s lips. But I’m sure from the way he spoke about it that he felt it to be the one real thing he had come across.

“ It’s no use my trying to give you his account of her dancing that night in his own words. All I can do is to

give you the picture of it that his account has left on my mind. He made it extraordinarily real to me. I'm not sure if I can convey any of that reality to you.

“ The dance opened with a slow and leisurely movement that she marked with clear and finished steps. Passing to and fro across the stage, with the least touch of mischief and expectancy in the firm carriage of her head, she seemed to be watching her steps, emphasising their precision and careful lest they should slip for a moment out of the delicate and formal texture of her dance. To and fro she went, backwards and forwards, and then, almost insensibly, as though a new spirit were blowing through the bars of that strict measure, her feet began to quicken upon the boards and her body to join their quickened movement.

“ To and fro she went, backwards and forwards : but now it was as though she were straining at the leash of the music instead of following, leading it on a magical quest in search of colour and of life. To and fro she went in a quick swaying measure. The gilded theatre and its scenery had vanished. Winds from a greater world than theirs were breathing into the gleaming circle of her dance. And still the music, falling further and further into the background, quickened its pace ; while her sweet and vital body, like a spirit of gay, melodious laughter, hovered and poised and quivered above it.

“ Again the dance slowed, returned to an echo of its opening. Again she seemed to be watching her own flying steps, but this time watching lest any fragment of the bright life of the dance should escape her dominion. Forward she went like a queen, and like a queen again drew back, and for a moment stayed her steps. Then she was off in final surrender to the swift challenge and adventure of her dancing. Her feet ran like foam driven by the wind. Life itself seemed caught into the fire of her quick travelling spirit, as she moved, a darting

## 28 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

patch of colour, flung to and fro across the web of the music. And then, when that glowing passion of rhythm had brimmed, brimmed to a bright sea of heavenly dancing, she stopped and for a moment stood poised, and with a gesture that seemed to take her dance and scatter it like spray into the surrounding darkness, suddenly she was fled."

. . . . .

Oliver leaned out of the window, and for a moment the other two watched him in silence. When he began his story again—

" Philip got up and went away," he said, " to get ready for the attack. Ivan has heard this part of the story before. We watched his party start out into the darkness ; and presently, waiting behind there in the trench, we saw the flash and burst of bombs ahead of us, and lights sailed up from the German front line ; and then machine-guns opened and we gave them back rapid fire from our line. Gradually the firing became spasmodic and presently it died away. And a messenger came back from Philip to say they'd got the post and wanted nothing but some more wire to carry on with. A thick fog came on about dawn, and in the mist we heard bombing start again in the direction of the farm and the sound of revolver shots. And suddenly as these got fewer, a single cry, clear and triumphant, came ringing through the fog,— ' Delia ! '

. . . . .

" Two days later my company took the farm again and held it. I happened to be one of the first to enter, and I found Philip lying face downwards behind a low fragment of wall, his arms drawn sharply into his sides. There was a knot of dead Germans in front of him in the grass—they looked almost like a group of waxworks

lying there in their grey uniforms. I think Philip must have caught them with his revolver, just before he died. This was his. I took it off his body that day and his people sent it back to me as a keepsake."

Oliver held up his hand and showed the luminous dial of his wrist watch. The others leaned forward, staring at the round patch of light that shone faintly in the darkness of the room. All three men were silent, thinking each in his own fashion of the ties, weightless and invisible, that bind the hearts of men. And in their minds the picture of that ruined farm changed to and fro with the sight of the stage where they had watched a solitary black figure dance that evening.

Ivan crossed to the window, and looked out with Oliver into the night. The grinding noise of a train broke through the silence. It died away, and the footsteps of a passer-by grew faint down the street. Overhead was a clear sweep of cloud and stars. Here and there beyond the river the black outline of a factory chimney rose against the sky. All about them lay the glimmering darkness of London. The drifting lights of a barge, half discerned and constantly hidden, were passing down with the tide. Below the window the tall trees stood still and silent, with hanging and compassionate branches. A clock behind them in the room struck one. There was a pause, and then Ivan got up.

"I was waiting for Big Ben to strike," he said, "I forgot . . ."

"Damn the war," said Tom. "Good night, Oliver."

He took his cap and coat and Ivan followed him out of the room.

## MIRANDA

### I

“ How do you like our tallest lilies ? ” said his neighbour, turning to Jack Temperley.

They were dining, a party of five, Colonel Hope, Harwood, Michael Rivers, Jack himself, and the girl whom Jack had often heard spoken of as Miranda Freyne. It was a dinner in celebration of the day on which they had all been wounded in a hopeless attack in France, and Miranda was acting as their hostess. The Colonel had nominated her to take the head of their table, and was sitting on her right hand. But Jack knew that she was also a friend of Michael’s, the only one of their party who was still serving with the regiment in the trenches, though home for a week’s leave.

The Colonel had spoken to him of Miranda several times when they had lunched together at the Club, and Jack had detected a special interest on the Colonel’s part from the very repetition of his allusions to her. He thought that he had divined through the Colonel’s puzzled references a personality more various than the simple medium in which it had been reflected for him. But he had met her to-night for the first time, and during the first part of dinner she had fulfilled her duty as hostess with a conventionality tempered by a charming shyness, which he guessed to be partly natural and partly a form of protective colouring.

Jack had been talking to Harwood on his left hand and had had as yet little opportunity of observing his

other neighbour. But at her question he turned towards her and followed her glance towards a group of red-tabbled officers and their rather showy lady companions, who were just sitting down at a table near by. Their host appeared to be a general, who, with an exaggerated playfulness, to which his guests suitably responded, was arranging his party for dinner.

“How do you like our tallest lilies?” the girl had said.

Jack looked back at her, and, seeing the amusement in her eyes—

“One must acquiesce in war time,” he said, with a slight shrug of the shoulders; “and you?”

“I prefer the fields of barley and of rye,” said she; and Jack fancied that her glance travelled for a moment to Michael Rivers opposite her at the table. The Colonel, on her other side, was looking at the table decorations in front of him, obviously puzzled to detect the connection between her question and the carnations of which they were composed.

“Dear lady,” he said, “I believe that you are again talking in the riddles which George Hope could never understand.”

“Dear Colonel,” she replied, “for the moment I was talking to Mr. Temperley, whom I do not really know. But I think that he understood my flowers of speech.”

The Colonel accepted her slight rebuke. “Then I must not interfere,” he said.

“Do you think anyone is glad for the war?” said Miranda.

Jack looked again at the General’s dinner party and back to her before he answered.

“I hope not,” he said, “but I’m never sure.”

“But supposing it was fated to come,” said she, “then I think the world’s divided into two classes—those who would rather have lived through it, since it was inevitable, and those who would sooner have lived years and years

ago or years and years to come. I wonder if you and I belong to the same class, Mr. Temperley."

Jack looked at her eager, lighted face, and made pretence to examine her carefully. Her slightly curling hair, cut short to the level of her neck, lent her a suggestion of boyish energy that might not, he felt, have been approved in an earlier generation. There was a gleam of mischief, too, in the look with which she resisted his scrutiny.

"I shouldn't say that you were meant to be born before your time," he replied.

"But you?" she said.

"Oh! I could never have trusted myself to hold my own with our grandfathers."

"Then I believe that you and I belong to the same generation. But what do you make of Major Rivers?" she went on, in a tone that Michael was evidently meant to hear. "I think he belongs either to the past or to the future, and I can never quite make out which."

Michael Rivers smiled at them a little grimly across the table. It seemed to Jack that a sort of challenge passed between him and the girl.

"Whatever my spiritual generation may be," he said, "for the time at least I am irrecoverably embedded in the present."

"This conversation is getting too intellectual for me," said the Colonel. "Let's go and drink our coffee in the lounge."

They moved back their chairs and stood up round the table, while Miranda gathered her gloves and prepared to go. She looked round the table to see that they were ready to follow her, and then turned to lead them out of the restaurant. The smartly dressed ladies, interspersed among the gentlemen with red tabs, broke off their bantering conversation to look at her with critical and yet approving eyes, and watched her moving towards the

stairs with glances that the slightest uncertainty on her part would have turned into a victory. But there was no uncertainty. She moved past half a dozen tables lighted with red-shaded lamps and decked with flowers and champagne bottles, and at the head of the stairs turned to see that they were following with a gesture that set her silver dress playing in the light.

The Colonel followed behind her. Harwood put his hand on Jack's arm and checked him for a moment.

"Who is she really, Jack? Do you know?" he said.

"I only know from hearing the Colonel talk about her. I believe he came across her somewhere in the course of his job. I hear that, like Melchizedek, she's without earthly ancestors; and they say she has a beautiful voice. I fancy Michael knows her pretty well."

They sat down round a small table in the corner of the lounge to their coffee and cigars.

"Harwood's inviting us to come as a party and spend a week-end with him just a month hence," the Colonel said. "It's bad luck that you'll be back in France, Michael. What about you, Miss Freyne? I hope you'll come."

The girl looked at him provokingly, and turned to Jack.

"Mr. Temperley," she said, "shall you be there?"

"I hope so," said Jack, "especially if I'm to have the privilege of extending our acquaintance of to-night."

"As a temporary officer of the regiment, I am this evening at the Colonel's orders," said Miranda. "May I be included, please, Mr. Harwood?"

Harwood laughed his assent and Miranda bowed to the Colonel.

They sat there, talking of their past days in France, till the lights in the lounge were partially turned down as a signal that closing time was near.

## 34 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

" Mayn't we forget the war even here ? " said Miranda. " Dear Colonel, is it for me, as an invited hostess, or for one of my brother officers to make the first move ? At any rate, whatever mess etiquette may be, I must be away."

" I'll see you home," said the Colonel.

" Major Rivers and Mr. Temperley promised to see me home, didn't you ? " said Miranda, looking from one to the other. The latter had certainly dared no such offer. Michael Rivers looked at her as though she had asked him a riddle.

" I am your servant," said he.

" May we walk ? " said Miranda, and she went off to get her cloak.

Jack walked up St. James's Street with her and Michael Rivers. He felt at once that there was a closer personal relationship between his companions than he had suspected at dinner, but that there was a constraint between them not due to his presence. Michael had been up at Oxford with him and, always with outward reservations which appeared to be inherent in his temperament, had been one of his best friends. Jack, besides liking, had always respected him, partly for the qualities of hard intellect which a natural modesty had largely concealed by the side of more obviously brilliant companions. He had been unconscious of himself, absorbed in whatever he was doing, free from any charlatan qualities of display. His very absorption had seemed sometimes to narrow his interests beyond those of other men, to carry with it a certain sterility in every field but that upon which his mind was set. He had always been something of a solitary, whose diffidence of manner had concealed the fine quality of a determination that had made whatever he set his hand to seem an inevitable course. When war broke out, he had enlisted in the ranks, and later, against his own inclination, had been persuaded to take

a commission. He had served steadily in the trenches, refusing always to take a staff billet. Jack had often questioned whether he was right—whether he ought not to have taken work for which intellectually he was so plainly fitted. But on this point Michael had been uncompromising. Jack knew that at heart he would never be happy unless he felt he was doing as hard a job as anyone else, and that, if he had taken on staff work, he would have worried at the idea of living in safety and sending other men into danger. To-night, Jack thought, he was showing traces of the continued strain of life in the trenches. He had been largely silent and there had been about him, when he spoke, a touch of bitterness that was new in Jack's experience.

In Piccadilly a few drops of rain began to fall, and, while Michael went to interview a taxi driver standing against the opposite kerb, Jack and Miranda were left alone.

"I hear that you're a singer," said he. "Will you promise to sing to us when we meet down at the Harwoods?"

"Why, yes," said Miranda lightly.

"That's a treaty?" said he.

"A treaty that will require ratification," she said gaily.

"Then I beg you for a vow."

"Captain Temperley, I like you. Therefore I vow by the twenty-four little hawthorn trees, that guard so ably the statue of Queen Victoria in Kensington Gardens, that you shall hear me sing that week-end if you really want to."

"I register that vow," said Jack, taking out his pocket-book and making pretence to inscribe it.

"Michael, dear, let's walk," she said, as he came back from a vain parley with the taxi. "It's stopped raining again now."

## 36 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

Jack noticed the affectionate use of the Christian name. They walked on westwards together. When they came to the door of her house, she bade good night to Jack.

“Michael,” she said, “come and see me before you go back.”

Rivers bowed his assent. She shut the door of her house behind her and the two men walked eastwards again.

“Miss Freyne seems a charming person,” Jack hazarded.

“She’s the sort of person one goes into the trenches for,” said Michael vehemently. “One comes home and finds the mandarins’ ranting below the level of any motive that would make one cross the street, let alone the Channel. One sees the profiteers running about in their Rolls-Royces with their fur coats and their cigars. One finds fellows beautifully dressed in red tabs who have never been as far as Folkestone since the war started. One wonders if there’s any England left worth fighting for at all. But Miranda—she’s almost England for me,” he ended, dropping from his vehemence into a smile.

“Are you still for refusing staff jobs?” said Jack.

“Yes,” said Michael. “I’ve too often cursed the devil with red tabs who has splashed us with his motor while we’ve been struggling back to billets with heavy packs and boys missing from the ranks. We’re always getting filled up again with lads from England, and somebody’s got to teach them not to throw away their lives.”

They stopped at the door of Jack’s rooms.

“Come in and have a smoke and a talk?” said he.

“No, thanks, old man. I’ve lots to do to-morrow, and I must enjoy a comfortable bed while I can.”

“Take care of yourself, Michael. I can see the strain’s

telling on you just a bit ; and remember that I shall always be counting my beads for your safety."

Michael shook his head and shoulders, as though to toss aside the suggestion of weakness. But he looked up with a friendly open smile as they parted.

"Tell your beads—I like to have your thoughts," he said. "But as for the end of it all, I'm a fatalist and I think my time's coming. 'The bright day is done and we are for the dark.' Do you remember how I used to say that those were the finest words in English poetry ? And now I think that for me they're going to be the truest. Good-bye, old man, and great good fortune to you."

He turned and went off quickly before Jack could answer ; a solitary, almost symbolical, figure. Jack, waiting at the open door until he had passed away into the night, had a sudden thought of him as a watchman, doomed for ever to look up from the outside darkness at the lighted windows of other men. But he banished the picture quickly from his mind, almost as though there were treachery in entertaining it, shut the door and mounted the stairs to his own rooms.

## II

It was seven o'clock of a summer's evening in June. Jack Temperley sat looking out of the window of his carriage at the quiet fields and little stations of Sussex through which his train was passing. It had started from London like an express ; and then, bit by bit, its original impetus had died out, and by the time it reached Fraylingham it seemed as though it would not have the energy to reach more than one further station. Harwood, with a pipe between his teeth, was waiting for him on the platform, and the two men strolled out together to his small car, which was ranked behind a village fly outside the station door.

"Sorry I couldn't manage the earlier train," said Jack. "I hope you got my wire. A whole bunch of cables came in from America at lunch time, and I didn't like to leave them. I'm afraid I'll have to go back to London to-morrow morning, too. In fact, I'm a fraudulent guest altogether. But I couldn't resist the lure of the country."

"What a pity!" said Harwood. "My wife will be disappointed, and so will Miss Freyne, I'm sure. She and the Colonel came down by the same train. Both of them expressed their regret at not bringing you with them ; but they seemed to have enjoyed their journey, nevertheless. It amuses me to see them together. The old man so obviously admires her, and she defends herself by behaving as though she was his adopted daughter and forces him into a paternal attitude. We've all been sitting in the summer-house since tea, and it's been great fun watching their manœuvres."

They drove uphill, first along a high road, then sharply to the right up a lane which passed through an oak coppice, where a cock pheasant scurried away through the undergrowth on their approach. They dipped into a village, where Harwood slowed down to point with pride to some cottages which he had built just before the war. Then the car swung left-handed through the gate of a drive, and in a few minutes, wheeling round to the door, stopped with a scrunch upon the gravel. A maid came out to take Jack's bag and Mrs. Harwood appeared in the hall behind her.

"Welcome the late-comer!" she said.

"This villain's only able to stay one night with us," said Harwood. "The Prime Minister, I gather, resigns to-morrow unless Jack is on the doorstep of Downing Street by noon."

"Oh, but what a shame!" said Mrs. Harwood. "We've made all sorts of plans for to-morrow and all dependent on your being there to make us enjoy them."

Jack made his apologies.

"It's too bad," said Mrs. Harwood. "The Prime Minister has lost my vote for ever. I always suspected him, and now I know. Everyone else has gone off to dress for dinner, I'm afraid. We said we'd dine without candlelight at a quarter to eight. Miss Freyne has promised to sing to us after dinner, provided she's allowed to play truant in the garden afterwards. I tell her it's a shameless request in one so beautiful, but that to a singer I will deny nothing. She and I have been picking flowers for the table and we decided to make you a button-hole."

Jack took a red carnation from her.

"My thanks to you both," he said.

"It was Miss Freyne's idea, to tell you the truth. And now, Harry, you'd better show Captain Temperley his room."

Coming down into the drawing-room half an hour later, he found Miranda standing in front of the window.

"Friend!" she said demurely, holding out her hand.

"Friend!" he answered her watchword, "and my thanks for this red flower."

"But that was Mrs. Harwood's idea," said the girl. "Wasn't it charming of her?"

Jack laughed and bowed.

"I hear that after dinner you're going to redeem the promise you made me, vowing by twenty-four little hawthorn trees."

She bent her head to one side, looking at him with a laughing show of perplexity.

"I have vowed so often by those trees—generally to remember not to lose my little dog. Had it anything to do with that? I can't remember."

"Then I'll keep your promise for another day. But to-night, I understand, you have consented to sing for the pleasure of Mr. and Mrs. Harwood and Colonel Hope. And I, too, would be of your audience."

"What am I to sing?" said the girl.

"That's a question for your own heart," said Jack.

"I'm half afraid," she said.

He looked at her enquiringly.

"Partly because you're critical, and partly——"

"Partly?"

"Perhaps I'll tell you after my song," she whispered, as Mrs. Harwood came into the room.

Dinner went gaily. Only the Colonel, a little embarrassed by the paternal rôle which Miranda kept mischievously thrusting upon him, was disposed to be serious. He was hardly skilful enough, Jack thought, for the test of showing his admiration in public. After dinner they all sat on round the dining-room table

together, until they had finished their cigarettes. At last Harwood drew back his chair.

"Miss Freyne, you promised to sing to us," he said, and got up as though to make the piano ready.

"Let me light some candles for you," said the Colonel.

"Stay where you are!" said she, rising. "For ten minutes I'm in command, and I'm going to sing to you in darkness and alone. And then you've promised I may play truant and leave you to your council of war."

She went across to the piano that stood opposite the fireplace of the hall where they were dining. There was silence for a few moments, and then she laughed and her clear voice broke through the twilight of the room.

*"When the voices of children are heard on the green,  
And laughing is heard on the hill,  
My heart is at rest within my breast,  
And everything else is still."*

"By George!" said the Colonel, as she finished the song, "you never told me you could sing like that."

Harwood murmured his thanks. Jack alone waited, saying nothing.

"Go on, my dear, please," said Mrs. Harwood.

Miranda had come across and was standing at the head of the table, her eyes bright in the falling darkness.

"One more," she said, "and then I'm ransomed?"

"A queen's ransom," said Jack.

"Travelling with the Colonel has filled me with thoughts of chivalry, and I'm going to sing you a song from 'Don Quixote,'" she said. Again she held them in a moment's silence, and then her voice, grave now and clear, seemed to pass through the pale squares of the windows into the waiting garden outside.

*“ I am a mariner to love,  
Which in his depths profound  
Still sails, and yet no hope can prove  
Of coming aye to th’ ground.”*

It was as though a strange woman had joined their company, so different was the singer from the girl who had just been laughing with them at the table, where Jack and Harwood and his wife and the Colonel still sat. Jack found himself looking at her empty place, as though to assure himself that she had really been there at all. She had come to the third verse of her song.

*“ I know not where my course to bend,  
And so confusedly,  
To see it only I pretend  
Careful and carelessly.”*

They sat in silence round the table. At length she came to the end of her song.

*“ O clear and soul-reviving star !  
Whose sight doth try my trust,  
If thou thy light from me debar,  
Instantly die I must.”*

The voice of her singing seemed to cross the room like a ship drifting out through a secure and comfortable harbour, an alien creature passing to rejoin the uncertainties of night and storm, for the company of which it had been fashioned.

“ And now may I go and play truant ? ” said Miranda to Mrs. Harwood. “ And will you promise not to be shocked ? ”

She was back again among them, the same girl that had been dining with them, and they were applauding her song.

" Dear child, I don't think anyone could be shocked with you to-night. Promise only that some day you'll sing to us again."

" Of course I will, if you'd like me to," she said lightly. " Mr. Temperley, will you come and play truant with me ? I should ask Colonel Hope, only he and I have been fencing with each other all the afternoon. And besides, I've state secrets to coax out of you—and I want to get to know you, if you're going so early to-morrow morning. Will you come and defend me in my truancy from the goblins and the shadows of the dark ? "

" Dear lady, you know I shall be delighted," said Jack.

He got up and fetched from a chair, where he had seen her put it down, a brilliant cloak of Chinese silk. He held it out for her and she drew it about her shoulders. Then she led the way across to the window and, waving her hand gaily to the company round the table, disappeared in front of him into the darkness.

She ran ahead of him along the terrace and he followed closely to where her white dress from under the cloak showed ghostlike in the darkness. As he came up to her :

" Stranger, I thank you," he said.

Standing on the edge of the garden, she slipped her hand lightly and almost shyly through his arm.

" Where shall we go ? " said he.

" Let's go into the fields," she said.

They went together down a path to where a wicket-gate led out of the garden. Neither of them spoke till the gate was shut behind them and they were walking along a track hardly discernible in the darkness.

" I think I know now the secret reason why you were afraid of singing," said Jack.

" And pray then, what was it, diviner of thoughts ? "

## 44 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

“ You knew that you couldn’t sing without showing your true self. And you were afraid of letting me see it.”

“ Are you a vagrant, too, Mr. Temperley? It’s a hard life, isn’t it, always pretending to belong to a stranger world? Why mayn’t one walk the dark earth at night, instead of being shut up in restaurants and theatres and—and even country houses? Do you feel, too, as though life had taken you a prisoner of war and put you in barracks and in cages? ”

They had come to the corner of a wood, and there she stopped and took a deep breath, her face turned upward to the sky.

“ How beautiful it is! ” she said.

It was a still evening of summer, with a few stars only apparent. A white moth drifted by them and vanished. As they stood there listening, they heard the small noises of night in the woods, the gentle stirring of creatures among the leaves.

“ I love the noises of the night,” she said, “ and there are so few people who have heard them. Generally, one goes by, and they’re lost in the sound of one’s own footsteps or the overmastering noises of the day. I sometimes think that it’s the same in life, and that most people go down to their graves with their ears stopped to its delicate music by the hammer and clang of their daily fighting. Tell me, reader of thoughts, a charm for the opening of my eyes and ears.”

As they stood there silently, the dull distant sound of the guns in Flanders came to their ears. The girl stirred.

“ I wonder if Michael is in the trenches to-night,” she said.

“ I was thinking of him, too,” said Jack. “ Have you heard from him lately? ”

“ I hear from him pretty regularly,” she replied ; “ but he writes only of his doings and never of his thoughts.

I sometimes think he's one of those 'whose lips are in their lives'; and yet——"

"I think I admire him more than any man I know," said Jack abruptly.

"I often think he's my best friend," said the girl. She paused. "Do you think a man and a woman can be only friends—while they are young?" she asked.

Jack hesitated a moment.

"I think perhaps they can, if they remember the old wolf trotting behind them. But one of them must always be looking back and watching for him, ready to shoot if he comes too near."

She laughed, and they walked on through the dewy grass, speaking little, but from time to time pointing out to each other objects dimly seen in the darkness. Presently she turned and led him back towards the garden, behind which the lighted windows of the house stood, softly challenging the night.

"Sometimes one must rest," she said. He hunted for her metaphor.

"You speak as a pilgrim?" he said.

"Perhaps."

"Sometimes," he went on, "I think that all mortal men are like swimmers, but a few of them are still standing on the rock and wondering if there's enough water for them to dive into."

She stopped for a moment and looked at him through the darkness, as though guessing for his meaning.

"Stay on your rock," said she, checking her steps for a moment; "stay on your rock. I like you standing, and it's true that the world's full of swimmers."

They were passing along a border where the evening primroses stood pale and silent, like ghosts waiting for the night. Jack bent down and picked one and, with a gesture of homage, gave it to her.

"Hail!" said he.

She took it from him and bowed with an air in which he recognised the least trace of mockery. Then, holding it for a moment like a sceptre—

“ You too would make me a princess,” she said ruefully, “ and princesses have so many duties.” And with that she led him back towards the lighted house.

She went before him through the window; and it struck him as they came in that the party had been waiting for them and that everyone looked up enquiringly as the curtain fell behind them.

“ Here are the merry wanderers of the night,” said Mrs. Harwood.

“ We have been discussing you all,” said Jack gaily, and he lit a cigarette.

“ And are we all satisfactorily labelled ? ” said Harwood.

“ We had only got so far as Colonel Hope,” said Miranda, “ and we had just decided that he was a very gallant swimmer, when it got too cold for further discussion.”

The Colonel bowed, mystified, but flattered by the kindness of her look.

“ My dear, you must come and get warm and dry your spoiled shoes,” said Mrs. Harwood, and led her across and sat her down in an arm-chair in front of the newly lighted fire of logs that was spitting and crackling in the open hearth.

“ Alas ! ” said Jack, “ and I was to have been classified next. How I hate the English climate ! ”

Miranda threw him a glance over her shoulder as she settled down in a corner by the fire and put her chin upon her hands.

“ May I ask the Colonel to read to us, Mrs. Harwood ? ” she said.

The Colonel blushed at the unexpected request.

“ I remember how charmingly you read to me, Colonel, that night I dined with you in London,” she went on.

He blushed more deeply, as though he had been caught in bed on the occasion of an enemy attack.

"The Colonel is a coward to-night," said Miranda. "Please, Mrs. Harwood, won't you read to us, then? I don't think Mr. Temperley could if he tried. He and I, like the wandering men in the poem, have been staring into the sky and our eyes are blind with stars."

So they all sat looking at the fire and listening to the reading. But when it came to eleven o'clock Mrs. Harwood put down her book.

"Thank you ever so much for giving us such a treat," said Miranda. The others murmured their gratitude.

"My dear," said Mrs. Harwood, "your song still remains the treat of the evening. And now you must come to bed, or you'll be tired to death to-morrow."

"Really?" said she, putting her head on one side. "I don't feel a bit like bed yet."

"Yes," said the Colonel, "we've got to look after you, you know."

Miranda put out her hands in token of submission to the forces against her.

"Then good night!" she said.

The three men drew closer to the fire, and mixed themselves whiskies and sodas. Harwood and the Colonel fell into an agricultural discussion.

"There's nothing like Golden Wonder," said Harwood—"in this part of the world, anyway. I tried British Queen last year, but I've gone back again to Golden Wonder this. Only now I'm trying once-grown seed from Lincolnshire instead of Scotch seed, and it's doing just as well. I'll show you the field to-morrow. But Jack's nearly asleep. Bedtime!"

Jack broke off from a reverie as Harwood got up to light the candles. He and the Colonel went upstairs while Harwood waited to see that the doors were locked and to turn off the lights.

## 48 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

"I'm afraid Miss Freyne will be tired to-morrow," said the Colonel, stopping outside his bedroom door to say good night to Jack. "We must look after her, you know. Good night!"

"Good night!" said Jack, and went on down the passage to his room.

### III

More than once during June and July they met in London, but seldom alone.

Then Miranda went off to stay in a series of country houses, while Jack stayed to work in London. She wrote to him sometimes from the country, and at last he heard from her that she was passing through London in October on her way to work in a hospital in France.

“Please,” she wrote, “may we meet on the evening that I’m to spend in London, and, if you please, may we be truants together, and not just meet at a dinner table ?”

On this they had arranged to meet at the gate of Kensington Gardens to the south of the Serpentine, and Jack between five and six was crossing the Park from the Marble Arch.

It was full of people pressing home silently from their work. Here and there soldiers and girls were lounging about by the railings or under the trees. But Jack hardly noticed them, being preoccupied with a picture of the Serpentine bridge and of a figure waiting for him at the gate beyond it. Once or twice he cast his thoughts backward over the summer. It was true that he had not seen much of her, and yet it seemed to him that they had grown more intimate. He remembered the dinner at which he had met her as if it were the starting of a voyage in which she and Colonel Hope, Harwood and he had all set sail together in convoy. Since then he and she had singled themselves out as companions ; but now it was as though, after some weeks of voyaging together, they had received orders to make for different ports.

This, at any rate for the present, was the last day of their sailing together. He jumped a low railing and crossed the grass towards the Serpentine ; skirted the hollow of the Powder Magazine and mounted on to the bridge. He crossed it with quick steps and there, upon the further side, Miranda was waiting for him. She stood smiling, but made no movement until he halted in front of her.

“ This is charming of you, friend,” he said. Miranda made him a little bow.

“ Where are we going ? ” said he.

“ Wherever you will.”

“ I like Kensington Gardens better than the Park. And you ? ”

She nodded, and they entered the gate. Jack picked up a small stick.

“ Shall this stick be our guide ? ” he said.

The girl took it from him.

“ Where lies fairyland, O stick ? ” she said, tossing it into the air. It spun and fell upon the gravel at their feet, pointing across the Gardens towards the Round Pond. They laughed and set off across the grass together.

“ What’s the news of the great world ? ” said she.

“ What, rather, is the news of fairyland ? ”

“ There’s never any news in fairyland. It’s made up of hopes and fears.”

“ And they ? ”

“ Jack,” she said. “ I’m rather frightened really. I’ve wanted to go abroad, you know, and I’ve always felt such a traitor when I’ve come down in the morning and found one of Michael’s letters waiting for me on the breakfast table. And, now that I’m going, I’m glad really. But all the time it haunts me to think how little I can really do compared with him. It’s so light a share of the burden that I shall be carrying, and yet I

have to keep praying that I shall be strong enough to bear it."

It was the first time that he had ever seen behind the armour that she wore against fate. She was near to tears, he felt, and he had a momentary picture of her as a ship coming out of shelter into a heavy wind and carrying, it might be, rather more sail than she could bear. But in a moment she had recovered herself. They were passing along an avenue of elms and the wind, crossing the gardens, scattered their yellow leaves in a shower.

"The children say that you have a happy month for every leaf you catch. Here's November," she cried, running after a falling leaf and catching it. And again she went off in pursuit of the tumbling yellow things, till she had caught in all ten of them, reciting the months of the year in turn as she captured each.

"August!" she cried, waiting provocatively for him to come up to her.

"And September?" said he.

She caught recklessly at a leaf that was drifting past her and missed it.

"September?" she said, "why, in September perhaps I shall be back in England again," and she put her hand through his arm. Jack caught it against his side and looked down at her.

"I suppose I'm glad you're going, but I'm jealous of them," he said, taking the crumpled leaves from her hand.

"Why?" said she.

"Because you'll be in France and I shall want you in England."

"I wonder," she said mockingly.

"I know," he said.

"I wonder," she repeated, looking ahead of her across the grass. "I'm a fraud, you know, really. Jack

imagines all sorts of things about me, and I like him to imagine them. But really, it's all his imagination and not me at all. And I think it's much better I should be in France. For then Jack can go on imagining and I shan't have so much to live up to. And by September he'll have framed such a creature of his own fancy that, when I come back again, he will come and meet me at the station, looking for quite a different person altogether. And when I get out of the train, he won't recognise me at all, and I shall slip off quietly down the platform, leaving him to dream till it's all empty and he's left looking at a pile of luggage, reading the labels, and perhaps, in his secret heart, a little relieved that I'm not there."

"Oh, but you're wrong," said he, "you're wrong. On the contrary, I shall lament every evening in every month that I've got no one to talk to and all my jolly thoughts will die. And after dinner at the Club I shall sit down and write long solemn letters about the Liberal Party and demobilisation, and sign them 'Yours sincerely, Jack Temperley,' and put red stamps on them, and go moping home. And Miranda will read half-way through the first page, and will then decide that she has allowed a dull soul to write to her, and she'll tear up all the part about demobilisation and the Liberal Party, and will twist the rings on her fingers, and repent her walk in Kensington Gardens. And, when she comes back to London, he will be waiting for her upon the platform in a black hat and a black coat, with his head full of politics. And this child, full of fairy thoughts, will step out of the train on the other side and give him the slip. And so they'll return, she to her fairyland and he to his Club. And no one could imagine on an evening like this, with the sun going down across Kensington Gardens and the last boats sailing homeward across the Round Pond, the thousands and thousands of dull thoughts that he'll think in all the remainder of his life."

They walked round the edge of the pond, and for a time they went in silence. Most of the children had gone home and the Gardens were empty except for a few boys waiting for their boats to come ashore, and some couples met together after their day's work. They crossed towards the Palace and turned in under the lime avenue by the Dutch garden. At the gate on the further side they stopped.

“ Why is it such fun being together ? ” said she.

Jack paused.

“ Perhaps—— ” he began.

“ I love our talking together,” she went on. “ It's like tossing coloured balls into the air ; and some of them you catch and some of them drift away and never come down again.”

It was growing dark and the light had faded out of the water in the pool in the middle of the garden. But a patch of marigolds almost at their feet still showed their bright heads as though in defiance of the night. Jack turned and looked at her. Her face and throat were pale in the twilight. He put out his arms and held her gently, and she as gently put up her face to be kissed.

“ Dear,” said he, “ this is our good-bye.”

She put her hands upon his shoulders and let him kiss her again and again, saying nothing.

“ All the months of the year will not hold the vows that I shall make against your home-coming. And when September comes—— ”

They turned and walked back through the low avenue in silence. It was as though the lime hedges had opened for a moment into an unexplored country. She put her hand through his arm again, but they were half-way down to the great gate of the Gardens before either of them spoke. The cry of a park-keeper, calling out that it was closing time, rang through the trees.

## 54 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

“ I shall remember this walk,” said he, “ if I come to the gate of heaven and see Peter with his jangling keys waiting there, doubtful whether to let me in. And if so be that he should let me pass, I shall say to him, ‘ Sir, have pity upon Miranda, too. For no one in the wide, round world was ever so kind to me as she.’ And don’t you think that even Peter himself will smile at that record of her kindness ? ”

The cry of the park-keeper, this time not fifty yards away, rang out again across the darkening Gardens.

“ Why must there always be a closing time in fairy-land ? ” said Jack. “ Will you make a league with me for the keeping open of fairyland without time limit or bound ? ”

“ That depends on the subscription,” she answered mischievously ; “ and, anyway, I shan’t get my next allowance until April.”

By now they were at the end of the Gardens. The waiting park-keeper let them through the gate. Miranda turned to Jack quickly.

“ Farewell ! ” she said, and gave him both her hands.

“ Farewell, my dear,” said he.

Then in a moment she was gone, turning only to wave her hand to him before she disappeared.

## IV

“. . . Since you are a friend of mine and maybe, I have sometimes hoped from her letters, more than a friend to her, I send you a letter for Miranda. Give it to her yourself. And know that I wish you both nothing but great happiness.”

Jack had read the letter, sitting in his London rooms. It had come from France, sent to him by a brother officer of the dead man’s; and beside it on the table lay an envelope addressed simply, in Michael’s handwriting, “For Miranda.”

Only that morning he had heard from Miranda herself. She was back in England, she had told him, and would like to see him. “So much has happened since last we met. I go to my cottage at Waterlea on Friday. Wouldn’t you perhaps come down on Sunday to Aveling and walk over the downs to supper with me? I would come out and meet you at the end of Long Mile a little before sunset. We can talk as we go.”

. . . . .

He mounted the chalky track that led on to the downs with little regard for the late blue and golden flowers that watched him from the banks on his either side. For his thoughts went ahead of him across the hill, and he had the sensation of pursuing them, like a hunter that dare not take his eyes off the creature that he is following. Often, in a hundred different settings, he had played over in imagination the meeting to which now he was going, sometimes with delight, sometimes with apprehension. To all their imagined meetings one feature had been

common—at last they had talked to each other, face to face, without reserve. To-day, broken rarely with tremulous gleams of light, apprehension hung over his spirit like a grey sky. Perhaps he had always known, but now for the first time he realised that, in spite of their past companionship, she was still to him a creature of dreams. Heretofore they had always been searching after each other's true thoughts. Reserve under different disguises had always stood between them. Her very name, he had sometimes fancied, bore a signal of reserve in it. Perhaps he had loved her the more for it—it had seemed to give to their relationship the quality of a work of art. Certainly it had put wonder into their meetings. He had delighted in the play of their imaginations together, its issue in fanciful images of speech. Yet he had penetration enough to know that these figures were but a line of outposts, thrust out to screen the true movements of their hearts, that could be withdrawn in case of need without too much loss to the main bodies of their thoughts. More than once, as a spectator, he had admired the quick play of her weapons in defence of herself against other men. Had he after all been blind to a variation in the play of those same weapons upon himself? He had felt that nobody had ever understood her as he did. But perhaps that was only her skill, and she made everyone in turn believe the same thing. Once, for a brief instant of their last meeting in Kensington Gardens, the light defences between them had parted and they had faced each other momentarily in bare and unconscious sympathy. That single moment, at least, was a good augury for the meeting before them. And he knew instinctively that upon this warm September evening, which already in a tide of mellow light was crossing the short-cropped grasses of the down, depended all the future dispositions of their separate hearts, the decision whether the marches and the counter-marches of their

watchful thoughts should be swept away in the confidence of a single advance upon the defences of a difficult world.

With that knowledge came apprehension and a return in visible form of the doubtful imaginings with which so often during the last year he had invested that coming meeting—that now, like fish rising on a windy day, broke in indistinct circles the troubled surface of his mind. He remembered how, crossing Kensington Gardens in the October twilight, she had told him that he imagined all sorts of things about her, but that really she was a different creature altogether. And for a moment he wondered if this was true, and whether, meeting her after their long parting, his imagination would fall, like a bird stricken in mid-flight and transformed in a moment from a vital spirit of the air to a crumpled heap of feathers lying strangely in the grass. That thought, as with a sense of treachery, he drove out from him, telling himself that it was no mere trick of his own imagination that had singled her out, till she had become in his mind a shining and a solitary figure, whose very brightness threw the rest of the world back into a deeper darkness.

Might not then the reverse be true? Might it not be that some quality in her had breathed life into him, had quickened his own poorer nature, and that now it was he who would prove to be unequal to her? She was coming back from the experience of a year in which he had had no share. Hers had always been a heart that had drawn richly from experience. Often in the past he had been puzzled by the contrast between the seeming maturity of her mind and the untouched freshness of her spirit—a maturity that seemed to be drawn from no passage through the tangible realities of life, as though by some quick flight she had achieved a view and a knowledge of living which others gained only by slow and measurable degrees. What if her life of the past year had

## 58 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

enlarged her spirit beyond the earth which they had walked in common a year ago, and if now he was doomed to watch her pass away from him, kind and unaccusing, but with dulled and disappointed eyes.

And then there was the letter which he bore for her in his pocket. Even though they should meet as they had parted, how could he judge what might be the effect upon her of that dead man's letter of unknown purport ? Michael's figure had always loomed in the background of their relations—a power of which she had seemed, if sometimes unconscious, to be sometimes even a little afraid—a power which it had often perplexed him to define, but of whose reality he had never since their first meeting been unaware. He had sometimes attributed to it an uncertain part of that ultimate reserve in her, and now he did not know whether death might not have swept away a quality of misunderstanding which, he had been used to feel sure, had rested between her and the dead man. And, if so ? . . .

. . . . .

She stood expecting him, a still waiting figure by a stone set in the open grass. She waved her hand at the first sight of him, and then rested motionless till he was close. She was bareheaded, in a dark dress of the straitest simplicity, without colour or ornament. But this he hardly noticed in the overwhelming sense of her personal presence.

“ Friend, this is my real welcome back to England,” she said, taking his hand. “ How long ago it seems since our walk in Kensington Gardens ! And you ? ”

None of his hundred imaginings had quite foretold the austerity of this meeting on the open down.

“ And you ? ” she repeated, questioning his silence.

He made a gesture as though to thrust aside his personality in favour of hers.

"Nothing's happened to me," he said, looking away from her. "I've just been working on in London, and there's not an inch been added to my stature."

"I'm so glad," said she. "I was afraid you might have outgrown me."

They paused for a moment, measuring each other with friendly but questioning eyes.

"Tell me all about France," said Jack.

"Tell me rather about England," she said quickly. "I've been working and I'm—bruised. To-night let me forget France."

He fell back lamely in self-defence beyond the ground of their last meeting.

"I saw the Colonel the other day. He was asking after you and complaining that you never wrote to him. Harwood and his wife both told me to give you their love when I met you. I went down and spent a week-end with them about a month ago."

Miranda was looking with distant eyes across the edge of the hills, and his words seemed to come late into her understanding, as though they had travelled out across the country in front of them and then back faintly to her ears.

"Dear Fraylingham," she said at length, half dreamily. "How was it looking?"

"I was disappointed with it rather, but I am not sure if I could tell why."

At the edge of a small wood of fir trees the girl stopped.

"I thought we should be too late getting home, so I brought our supper up here," she explained; and jumping up a bank by the wood side she brought out a basket that she had hidden in the trees.

"I hope you're hungry," she said.

They sat down side by side on the bank, and he helped her to unpack the supper of cakes and fruit that she had brought with her. Already the margin of the world was

## 60 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

limited with a band of glowing red. The heavens leaned toward it, a deep blue sky bending into delicate green. Night was advancing up the edge of the hill. The trees of the hedgerows, distant below them, that by day had stood out like bushes against the paler meadows, were now enveloped with them in the evening mist. Only about the cloudy expanse of country the little ponds upon the common were turned to pools of gold.

The two watchers sat in silence. Both of them were oppressed by the sense of thoughts knocking at the doors of their minds for release. Each was seeking for a reprieve to the inevitable opening. Almost unconsciously they saw in the surrender of the world to darkness the moment in which their thoughts must be spoken ; and, as they sat waiting for the dark, their wishes strove instinctively to prolong the dying light of day. As the last gleam vanished, Miranda shivered.

“ Shall we make a little fire ? ” she said.

He agreed gratefully with her plan, and they busied themselves in collecting branches and twigs from the wood. Miranda set light to a bunch of twigs and bracken, and they crouched beside the fire, tending it carefully, till the heart of it was red-hot. Then they put a heap of branches on it, and at last Jack fetched a log and laid it across the burning heap. Then only, when the crackling blaze had sunk down to a steady but flickering glow, did he at last speak the thoughts that were knocking at his heart.

“ I have a letter for you,” he said.

She answered nothing, sitting perfectly quiet, while he fumbled in his pocket and drew out the letter which had been sent to him for delivery to her. She took it from him, still without a word, and he drew back a little from the fire, as she broke the seal and opened it, and then, holding it sideways to the firelight, read. It was dark now. Jack sat staring into the fire, but from time

to time he looked up at her, seeing only against the dark the whiteness of her face and hands and the piece of paper held between them. She read it slowly, and then, when she had finished, sat also for a while looking into the fire without speaking. But at length—

“ Since he was a friend of yours and entrusted it to you, I should like you to read it,” she said.

Jack drew up towards the fire and, himself without speaking, took the dead man’s letter and read it.

“ *My Dear,—*

*You will not get this while I am living and I think you will not mind what I say when I am dead.*

*I suppose that really you cannot be different from many other women, but for me at least you have been a symbol of all that we have been fighting for—not power, nor wealth, nor even victory, but simpler things than these. Read in your own heart and say what they are.*

*Sometimes I think that it might have gone differently with us. But always there seems to have been a fate compelling me, that’s kept me away from you, that’s prevented me from ever telling you what I had in my heart. Often in the night I’ve woken up and imaginations of you have come leaping and tumbling about me, like a shoal of bright and innumerable fish, till it has seemed as though the net of my mind must burst with their teeming multitude. And I’ve wished to myself that you were but there to see this joyous army, that I’ve caught in the meshes of my heart for you ; that my thoughts were but strong enough to contain their silvery struggling company till we should meet again. And then—when next we’ve met, I’ve been dull with you and melancholy and talked like nothing but poor Poll.*

*Yes, there seems always a fate against my telling you even a little of what I mean. I thought of writing it all to you to-night, but perhaps it is better left finally unsaid.*

## 62 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

*Therefore I will only add one word of gratitude. I was thinking of you last night and wondering how I should tell you ; and suddenly I laughed and said to myself, ‘ Oh, if thanks were but pearls, Miranda would be standing on tiptoe, with her head poised in that delicate and mischievous way of hers, and there would be hanging from her white throat to her little toes the longest and most delightful of all the necklaces in the world.’*

*With that picture I fell asleep, and with it now I say good-bye. Good-bye, my dear. You have all my love.*

*Michael.”*

Again for a time, when he had finished reading and had handed her back the letter, they sat in silence.

“ How different people are from their letters,” at length she said musingly, and paused. Then, with a sudden decision of speech, her voice broke into the darkness.

“ He was a man,” she said, and paused again. “ He was a man,” she went on again, speaking as though impersonally to the night and not to her companion, “ fated always to give and seldom to receive, who held back nothing. There was something magnificent in his giving—something unreturnable, not always to be understood.”

Her grave, clear voice sprang away into the darkness. There was that in it which brought back to him, as she spoke, the manner of her singing on that summer night, when there had seemed to him to be present in the room a different creature from the girl that had been sitting by him. There was no answer, he felt, expected, save the silent answer of the enveloping darkness, and none other to be given. Again they sat side by side in silence. The voice of the dead man, crossing mysteriously the barriers of death, seemed also to have broken down the barriers that separated their own sheltered and groping

spirits from the travailing world out of which it came. They were spectators of a struggle of forces that dwarfed their own small personalities. For long they had tried, had accustomed themselves to think of it as a great creative activity, a terrifying but inevitable passage towards a calm and noble end. At that moment, with the sense of that lost man quick in their separate hearts, it seemed as if those ravaging powers were at grips for a victory without achievement, as though before their eyes the mighty forces were cancelling each other in darkness and in blind eclipse. The letter lay between them, passed back as it were out of that advancing darkness by the hand of one doomed himself to perish in it, a flickering point of fire, beaten down already and in peril surely each moment of being vanquished by the dangerous and devouring wind.

How small and precarious a signal it seemed from that battleground of tempestuous forces, and yet—"Fated always to give," she had said of him. Certainly he had given up to seeming destruction, a ransom for the delight of others, love and happiness, his fortune and his life. And what remained of his gifts? At least he had left with them the sense of a spirit dauntless and persisting, unseen yet more substantial than the engulfing shadows of the dark—he, a giver without gesture, unrewarded, yet richer than the requited sons of men.

A cold breath of the night wind crept across the downs, and for a moment the flames of the fire beside them were bowed by its passing. The sense of vigil was strong within them. Without a word, Jack got up, and, crossing to a haystack built under shelter of the wood, drew from it an armful of hay. He stepped slowly through the darkness back again towards the fire, and, laying it upon the ground, spread it as a bed upon the grass.

"Now you must sleep," he said.

## 64 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

She rose unresistingly. He helped her gently down into the hay, and, bending over her, drew the warm, dry stuff about her. As he knelt there, he could see only her eyes shining in the darkness. They looked at him steadily and mysteriously, brilliant, he thought, but was not sure, with tears. And when he had finally wrapped her securely against the cold—

“Good night, dear,” he said, and she in a whisper answered him.

He went back slowly to the haystack, and, walking round it, drew out another bundle of hay and set it by the edge of the wood. He lay down where, lying, he could still watch across the edge of the hill. Orion stood out clear in the heavens, and all about was scattered over the night the confused array of stars. For long he lay and watched them, so different in their inexplicable order from the dulled and weary armies of men. For long he lay and watched them, till at length he fell asleep.

When he woke it was nearly daybreak. He lay still, while the dawn rose to a golden haze, drew back defeated to grey. Then in a smoky glory the forces of the dawn, mistily confused with the retreating darkness, swelled again with the triumphant coming of the light. Morning came across the hill. Colour breathed into the grass, into the trees. The haystack stood out more substantial than the shadow which had watched beside him through the night. He got up and, shaking the hay from his shoulders, crossed to his companion.

She was lying with her eyes wide open, watching the pageant of the morning advancing over the hill. And, as he bent over her, she put up her arms gently and, drawing his head down towards her, kissed him.

They walked down the hill together, side by side, and

as they went she put her hand into his. The chalky track of the hillside ended, and soon they were crossing the dewy meadows still grave with the night. The willows by the stream stood motionless in the morning air. There was a stirring in the farm across the valley. Already the slow cattle were moving in the fields. Side by side across the grass in front of them went the long shadows of themselves. And to their following hearts it seemed that the gaiety of the reviving day was subdued by a solemnity sprung from something deeper than the abandoned night. So, still hand in hand, they came to the door of her house.

## THE ORDERLY ROOM

TIMOTHY FANE swung through the barrack gate on his way to the station with a marvellous sense of buoyancy and release. The pass in his pocket stated that No. 4142, Pte. Fane, had leave to be absent from his quarters from 1 p.m., November 24, till tattoo, November 25; and whole tracts of his brain that had lain fallow for three months were blossoming as he went. When war broke out he had been for two years a civil servant in one of the dullest and most overstaffed of Government offices. They had refused to let him go on the plea of excessive work; so, having some small private means of his own, he had resigned his job and enlisted. He had regretted this decision only at the rarest moments; but that did not prevent him from experiencing an extreme elation at the prospect of even two days' liberation from barracks. He hummed, as he crossed the common, a little setting he had made up to the old nursery rhyme—

“ How many miles to Babylon ?  
Three score and ten.  
Shall I get there by candle-light ?  
Yes, and back again.”

He hadn't made any definite plans. He hoped to be in London in time to change and get tea at the Club, and there was a little business to be settled. He longed to see the London shops again; and above all, he wanted to see Rosalind. But for some reason she had not answered his letter, and he had been careful not to book up his time until he knew when she could meet him.

At the station he bought a *Tatler*, but he looked out of the window most of the way ; and it was lying open, but still for the most part unread, upon his knees, when the train plunged into the series of tunnels which lead to London, and was gliding, almost before he realised where he was, along the platform of Liverpool Street. He jumped out, took a taxi, and drove to Lincoln's Inn. Sitting back loosely in a corner of the cab, he watched with increasing delight the crowds moving slowly past the Christmas shop windows. Placards announcing another great Russian victory flared at every street corner ; and he realised for the first time how small a part the war had really played in his life during the last three months.

Once in his rooms, he looked eagerly for Rosalind's handwriting, and, with a certain sense of unquietness, failed to find it. He threw off his uniform into a heap in the corner, and plunged luxuriously into a hot bath. Drying leisurely in front of the fire, he dressed himself in plain clothes again with a delightful sense of airiness and freedom, and went down to his Club. There he ordered tea and hot toast, and ran upstairs to the upper smoking-room. Four middle-aged men were playing bridge in one corner, while three others, assisted by cigars, were standing in front of the fire, discussing the passage of the Russians through England and capping each other's stories of people who had seen them. It pleased him at any rate to fancy that they looked at him as on one who was not taking his fair share in national events ; and he stayed on in the Club, lazy and contented, till dinner-time, writing letters and reading the papers. In the old days he had used it very little, occasionally taking a friend there to lunch but in general avoiding its ponderous quietness. To-day its very silence and dullness had a certain appeal for him, long confined as he had been to the ill-lit publicity of a barrack room.

## 68 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

He slept in his rooms, lying idly in bed the next morning till after nine o'clock. There was still no letter from Rosalind, and he sent her a wire, saying that he would come down about three on the chance of finding her. In the course of the morning he visited his solicitors, and fixed up his will ; and then he strolled down Regent Street and Bond Street, amusing himself with the shop windows and the people on the pavement till it was time to lunch with his grandmother in Eaton Square. He found her full of dark and ill-supported stories of regiments that had run away, Dreadnoughts that had been blown up, members of the baronetage that had been shot as spies, members of the peerage that were interred in the Tower. Timothy escaped from her and from the West End with relief, taking an eastward-bound train at Victoria. He got out at Stepney Green, and was soon in the square where Rosalind lived. It was full, as usual, of Jewish children playing among the dead leaves that the wind had gathered into drifts. Of old he had sometimes stopped to talk to them and play with them ; but to-day he walked straight through the garden and stopped before a house at the farther end of the square.

“ Well, Mrs. Robins, how are you ? ” he asked cheerfully, as a meagre woman in curling-papers answered his knock upon the door.

“ Nicely, thank you, sir,” the woman answered, looking at him, he thought, with a certain strangeness. “ I hope you’re the same, sir,” she added rather hurriedly, as though recollecting suddenly the amenities due from her.

“ Oh, splendid, thanks. What about Miss Ogilvie ? Is she at home ? ”

“ No, sir,” said the woman, looking at him uneasily, as though wondering how much he knew. “ She went away last night, sir. She wrote to you before she went, but I just see’d the letter not five minutes ago still lying on her table. I expect as how she forgot to post it.”

"Oh," said Timothy, the fear of something unknown rising in him. "Where did she go to, do you know?"

"She went off in a great hurry, sir. A gentleman came and picked her up in a taxicab about nine o'clock last night. I believe, sir," she said uneasily, swaying from one foot to the other and shifting her eyes from his, "they was going to get married."

Timothy's mind rocked like a ship that suddenly finds herself in the breakers. But the woman's presence helped him to keep the rudder firm for a few moments longer.

"Mrs. Robins, I've got an hour or two to waste before I catch a train. Do you mind if I go and sit up in Miss Ogilvie's rooms for a bit? I'm sure she'd let me, wouldn't she?"

Mrs. Robins, glad to be released from a situation which she felt to be too hard for her, at once agreed.

"Why, sir, of course, and welcome," she said, and led the way busily upstairs, holding up her dingy dress on either side.

She opened the door at the top of the first flight of stairs and, preceding him into the sitting-room, cleared and drew up an arm-chair for him.

"That's the letter I was meaning, sir. I'm glad you've come, for I was wondering whether to post it or not," and she pointed out a stamped envelope on the table addressed to himself.

She pretended to be tidying up as he took the letter, her curiosity bidding her remain so long as she was not called upon to play a prominent part in what she suspected to be a disaster.

"Never mind about that, Mrs. Robins," he said. "I'm afraid it'll be a long job getting all those things straight," and he indicated with a nod the heap of books and other belongings that littered the writing-table and the chairs. "I should leave it till the morning."

## 70 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

Half reluctant to miss the next incident in these strange events, half glad to avoid further questions, Mrs. Robins withdrew, giving an air of spontaneity to her retreat by picking up and taking with her a pair of Rosalind's shoes to clean.

As the door closed, Timothy Fane pulled her letter open with a jerk of his forefinger and read :

“ I’m just off to marry Basil, who’s back from the Front on a week’s leave. I know you’ll think me a perfect beast not to have told you about it before ; but I only knew myself three days ago, and, anyhow, you’ve got to forgive me.

“ Tim, dear, you always understood me so well, and I know you’ll understand this. I’ll write to you as soon as I get a moment.—ROSALIND.”

The next hour, the strangest of all his life, he could never afterwards forget and never clearly recall. He remembered chiefly roaming up and down the little room, torn with feelings for which he could find no outlet in action. He was hurt, bitterly hurt, by the casualness of her note. He was angry with her, but much more angry with Basil Morton for what they had done. Above all he was devoured by wolfish jealousy. It tortured him, mind and body.

He remembered her first as a tall, slim girl in a starry dress of blue and silver, swaying suddenly into his view at a dance and instantly dominating the room. He had stood in a corner and watched her, admiring the clean curves of her hair, caught back by a single band, and the great blue tourmaline at her throat, a noble ornament that suited, he told himself, her fine barbaric beauty. A few weeks later he had found himself by chance sitting next to her at dinner. She had suddenly turned from her other neighbour and spoken to him.

" We're talking about the world, Mr. Fane ; what would you alter first in it, if you had the chance ? " she had said gaily, looking him straight in the eyes. And he had caught her mood and answered her, with just the shade of seriousness that had underlain her own gaiety.

" The hearts of men and the minds of women, Miss Ogilvie."

" Oh, but this is a wizard," she had cried ; " Mr. Fane, I shall love you."

Thence they had passed on to the rattle, the quick give and take of whole-hearted conversation. She had led the talk, her ideas coming to him, he had thought at the time, like catches in the slips at cricket. And he prided himself that he had fielded every one of them and had hurled them back with something of his own in the throw, that had enabled him to snatch her promise, before the ladies broke away from the table, that some day she would come to tea with him.

Thereafter he had met her sometimes at dances, generally without much satisfaction. He would come in tired after his work, dispirited with weariness ; and she in her magnificence would seem so far removed from his dull, mortal humour. Once or twice their moods had harmonised. There had been a dance on a close July night, at which she had insisted on walking about the streets instead of dancing ; and, springing suddenly from him as they passed a smart, newly painted house, she had run up the front-door steps and broken off three magnificent sprays of scarlet geranium from one of its window-boxes. These she had pinned into her white dress, and " Flowers from Nowhere," she had said, as they came back into the lighted supper-room, turning to show him how fine a decoration they made ; and presently had raised her glass to the health of the gardener who grew them, and the conversion of the rich man whose geraniums they were.

Soon after that she had broken away from her people, being tired, she explained to him, of living up to the theory that she had only to show herself on their doorstep to make her selection among the eligible crowned heads of Europe. They had refused to let her become a professional singer, and she was determined to sing, having the makings, she was told, of a fine contralto voice. And so, when an aunt left her a legacy, she broke away from home and went off to live in the East End and started to work hard at her singing. He had come to see more of her then. They had explored London together of an evening in perfect companionship and freedom. If the streets were dull they told each other stories to make up for it ; and they generally ended with supper in his rooms or in hers. He had realised all the time that a crisis in their relations must come sooner or later. But she had taken everything for granted, never looking beyond the day, either forward to anticipate or backward to regret. Physical beauty always had a great effect on her. She would stop suddenly in the street to watch a man or a woman who attracted her ; and when first she had met Basil Morton in his rooms, she had admired him excessively. "Oh, who's that man with the golden head ?" she had asked Timothy after Basil had left the room. "You know, some day I shall run away with a glorious head like that, and leave you all alone to tell stories to yourself. Would you like that, Tim ?" she had said, peeping round the door at him as she went out.

The crisis had come, one splendid spring morning. She was living in a cottage in Surrey then, and he had come down by an early train and walked out half-way from the station to meet her. He had got to their meeting-place first, and had sat down on a sandy bank at the edge of a pine wood to wait for her. Then suddenly she had come into sight, round a turn in the road, a swaying figure in a light grey dress with a crimson scarf about her

hair and throat, a grey figure that waved to him as she caught sight of him and then broke into a run that brought her panting up to where he stood waiting. "Oh, Tim, I'm so glad to see you," she had said. And she had led him off, through pine woods, across streams and over rolling sandy ridges, to a little grassy hollow in the heather. And there they had sat down side by side, and talked about life and about herself.

"Oh, I'm so glad to have you here, and I'm so glad to have got away from home," she had said, laughing and stretching out her arms to the heather and the sunlight. "You can't imagine what it's like to me to be free. Don't you think it's an awful shame, Tim, the way they bring up girls in our class? There's nothing for them to do at home, and they aren't allowed to do anything outside. Sometimes when I felt desperate I used to set to work and scrub the passages for very boredom. And then all the servants said they hated to see me do it, and mother told me I had the soul of a housemaid. How I used to envy the girls I saw in the streets, going about happily together or spending the evening with their young men! Everything at home was so half-hearted; one wasn't allowed to throw oneself into anything. If one got keen about something, it always had to be postponed to calls and lunches and tea-parties, till it died a natural death. One could hardly speak to a man except at dances; and then one was just like an animal brought to market, with the men dropping in casually, as they felt inclined, to inspect one, and the chaperons round the wall waiting to take one home again. I wished often that it *was* a market. I'd far sooner have been taken out frankly with a lot of other girls into a regular market, where no one pretended that it was anything else, and no one attempted to disguise what was happening with flowers and champagne and expensive dresses. But now I'm free of all that—free, free, free!" And with that cry she had suddenly

put her arm round his neck and had drawn his head towards her and kissed him ; and then had leapt to her feet and sprung off across the heather like a deer, looking round just once to provoke him into pursuit of her.

He had followed her, and had come upon her round the corner of a birch copse, lying in long grass, breathless and laughing.

“ Rosalind,” he had cried out, serious and laughing at once, “ you must marry me ; really, dear, you must.”

“ Oh, Timothy, Timothy,” she had said, “ you mustn’t talk about being married in a fairy wood like this. And I *will* be allowed to put my arm round your neck—yes, and to kiss you too, Tim—without your being obliged to propose to me. No, I don’t think I’ll ever marry you, and I don’t think I’ll ever marry anyone else. But we’ll talk it all out some night in London, when we’ve nothing better to talk about. But now—but now we’re going to explore this magic wood.” And with a feigned air of mystery she had led the way like a scout on the trail into the heart of the birches.

Later on that summer he had tried one evening in his rooms to start the promised argument. But first she had forgotten all about it, and then she had remembered, but laughed at him and told him she wanted to sing and to be free, and that, if she married him, she would certainly not be free and therefore would not be able to sing. She cared for nobody, she said, but she wanted to be free to care for anybody she met and liked the looks of. And in any case she didn’t know in the least yet what she was made of, and wasn’t ready to think of marrying. And with that she had caught up an armful of poppies from his table and wrapped their stalks in a black scarf she was wearing, and so run away, with a gesture that had haunted him through the wakeful hours of that September night.

It must have been the war that had brought her so suddenly to destruction. He knew from his own obser-

vations in London during the fortnight after it broke out what a strangely moving effect it had had upon women—the sort of women one saw every day in the streets. But Rosalind? He began to search his memory of her, to review her speech and her actions, if haply he could discover what spring it was in her nature that had now so swiftly, so irretrievably betrayed her.

What an incarnation of life she was, with her vivid, eager beauty and her deep, resonant voice! A creature of changing moods, that each in turn absorbed her and washed out, like an incoming tide, all traces of its predecessors; of sudden imaginings that must come instantly to action or be forgotten; of unforeseen and delightful doings that by their very unexpectedness won the hearts of men and women; of a love of children and of stories, and of a direct and imaginative speech that blew sparks from the dullest object. Sometimes she would be devoured by evil moods—possessed by bogies, he used to tell her—when she would hate the present and be afraid of the future. At such moments she would strike at whatever came first to her hand, wounding by quick and bitter speech more often her friends than her enemies. But these were brief-lived moods that passed, sometimes by way of penitence, but more often back through complete unconsciousness and oblivion to a full-hearted affection for those who loved her.

The unexpectedness of her ways, it was, that had first appealed to him, and satisfied the instinct for fantasy and adventure that his work had signally failed to employ. All his desire to play with life and try experiments with it and tell stories about it had gone out to meet the imagination in her, the swift variety of her thoughts and moods. There were a dozen natures brimming in her, he used to think, and each one ready to pour over into quick, glancing life. Surely she was a being made to move the hearts of men!

## 76 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

He had grown so accustomed to think of her as his, or at least as nobody else's. And yet he had known that other men would fall in love with her, that she would be frank and free with them as she had been frank and free with him ; that she would enjoy their admiration of her provided they were cheerful, and would mock at them if they began to mope and make themselves miserable on her account.

That he had expected and that he could have endured. But this that had happened struck not only at his personal pride but at his idea of her. He had been at school and at college with Basil Morton ; and he had consistently beaten him. He had been cleverer than he was ; he had been better at games than he ; and among men he had always been the better liked. And now Rosalind of all women had fallen a victim to this commonplace—this second-rate, unimaginative, good-looking man. No doubt Basil felt her beauty, but how would he be able to understand her moods and her mind, her humour and fantasticalness ? His narrow, meagre spirit would be soured by her evil moods, instead of quickening to coax away her terrors, her bogies, even her cruelties. He would be like a blind man walking beside her through life—self-satisfied, probably, and happy enough, but debarred for ever by his own limitations from realising all that he was spoiling, from knowing all that he missed.

And he himself. What could he have done differently that might have won her ? If he had been bolder with her, more decided, more tyrannical even, would he have captured her ? But then it wasn't his way to be tyrannical. Besides, it was hateful that anyone should have captured her at all. She was made to be a comrade of men, to meet them freely and on equal terms, not to be lured, ensnared, captured.

He pictured their next meeting—Basil stupid, hearty and uncomprehending ; he himself shy and uncertain of

everything. How would she carry it off? Would she, too, be reserved and diffident, or would she leap at him with all the frankness of their old companionship, and show him that her spirit was still free and untrapped? Perhaps she would get tired of Basil altogether—bored with his good looks and his dullness! Mightn't she come stealing to his door one evening and ask to be allowed in to supper? The thought of that possibility roused his blood again. He could hear her knocking upon the door, could see her merry face peeping round it, her fine delicate body slipping into the room. She would come and sit on the arm of his chair and ask him to forgive her and treat her just as of old. And before he had time to recover from his surprise and make up his mind what to do, she would be drawing the curtains and laying the supper and probably dancing a story on the hearthrug to please him. He knew well that he'd be absurdly joyful when she came, that he'd forgive her and enter into the spirit of it all. He felt almost certain, too, that she'd come just as he had imagined. And then, with a sudden chill, he remembered that if she came, he wouldn't be there, but would be sitting on his bed in some hideous, colourless barrack room, with the bugles and the crunching of the sentry's feet upon the gravel, and the noise of his fellows gambling at the table.

He sat there till long after dark, till he could see little but the outline of the tree-tops in front of him, and the grey sky overhead. He was utterly weary now. He walked round the room, fingering almost mechanically some of Rosalind's belongings, and, picking up the pair of earrings he had given her, he slipped them into his pocket, vowing she should have them back when she came to fetch them. Then he opened the door, went heavily downstairs and let himself out into the street.

Of the rest of that night, and of the day which followed it, and of the night which followed that again, he had

## 78 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

afterwards only the vaguest recollection. In a dim welter of memory there stood out an impression of the brilliantly lighted doorways of picture palaces, of trams sailing along a darkened Embankment, of the Houses of Parliament, with a light still burning above Big Ben. It seemed to him that he had wandered about a common—Wimbledon Common, he supposed—through hours of darkness breaking into wan daylight, fancying that he was on a route march and must not fall out without permission from a sergeant whom he could never quite catch up. Some time in the course of the night he must have travelled in a motor bus, for he remembered watching the shadows of the rain-drops on the window chase across the backs of his fellow-passengers as the omnibus scudded past the darkened lamps. Somehow, too, he must have got back to his rooms ; for he remembered sleeping on his bed there, restlessly and brokenly, putting on his uniform again, and walking through London streets once more in the early hours of a drizzling morning, feverish and utterly worn out.

At the barrack gate he fumbled silently for his pass, had a brief interview with the sergeant on gate-duty, and was told to empty his pockets. As he did this, Rosalind's blue and silver earrings fell out upon the table, and the sergeant grunted. Then he was hurried into the bare and gloomy guard detention room, where he lay on a mattress among six other unfortunates till the doctor had passed him as fit for punishment.

Commanding Officer's orders that day were left over till after four o'clock ; and it was getting dark before he was marched out under escort of two men of the guard and formed up outside the orderly room in a line with several witnesses and another man from his company. They stood there at ease under the window for nearly half an hour, listening to the rainwater dripping from a gutter on the opposite side of the road. Then the door

opened, a file of men came tumbling out, a voice inside called "Next," and the sergeant shouted, "Number 3 Company, 'tention. Left wheel, quick march. Right wheel. Halt-t-t. Right turn."

The door shut behind the party ; and he found himself standing before a small table, at which a man whom he identified uncertainly as the commanding officer was sitting on the adjutant's right. The sergeant-in-waiting of his company, who led the file, read out the business.

"No. 3 Company, sir. One man dismissed detention. One man Guard Report."

The battalion sergeant-major rapped out the name of the man released from detention : "O'Brien."

A pause ; then, as O'Brien made no motion, "O'Brien, pace forward. Look t' yer front."

O'Brien took a short pace forward and clicked his heels together.

"This man, sir," said the sergeant-major, "had fourteen days' detention ; drunk and resisting escort."

The commanding officer looked vaguely up from his papers, said "All right," and again looked down.

"Fall in," snapped the sergeant-major, and referred the colonel to the Guard Report.

"Fane," called the colonel, looking up at the line in front of him as he spoke.

Timothy Fane took the same short pace to his front, a little wearily as compared with the man who saw the prospect of many drinks in front of him after fourteen days in the cells. He looked fixedly over the colonel's head at an official diagram on the wall, illustrating the differences between English and German airships. The colonel looked down again to the Guard Report and read out the charge :

"Absent from 10 p.m. November 25 to 6.20 a.m. November 28 : fifty-six hours and twenty minutes. Sergeant Evans."

## 80 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

The sergeant sprang to his front.

"Sir, I was sergeant-in-waiting, Number 3 Company, on the night in question. I called the roll at tattoo. The accused did not answer his name."

He stepped back.

"Sergeant Temple," read out the commanding officer.

"Sir, I was sergeant of the barrack guard on November 28. The accused returned to barracks at 6.20 a.m. I confined him in the usual manner."

"Was he clean and sober?" asked the colonel.

"Sir, he was not drunk; he had been drinking. He was fairly clean."

"Anything to say?" said the colonel to the accused.

Timothy Fane knew himself in a world where Rosalinds didn't count. "Nothing, sir," he said.

The colonel paused for a moment's consideration. Then, "You men are much too casual," he said. "I give you special privileges and you abuse them; and not only that, but you make it very difficult for me to grant similar privileges to other men. Is this man a recruit, Sergeant-major?"

"A young soldier, sir. He came on from the depot about a month ago. He's a great disappointment to me, this man, sir," said the sergeant-major, speaking deliberately and looking at Timothy Fane. "I was just going to recommend you to give him a stripe. He's a well-educated man, sir, and might have done very well. But a man who behaves like this is no use to me, sir—no use at all."

The colonel fingered his pen and bent over the Guard Report.

"Well, if you will stay away without leave, you must pay the usual penalty. Seventy-two hours' detention."

"And lose three days' pay," prompted the adjutant.

"And lose three days' pay by Royal Warrant," resumed the colonel.

" Fall in," shouted the sergeant-major. " Right turn. Quick march."

Witnesses and accused, the escort, the man released from detention and the company sergeant-in-waiting passed out of the room together, lifting their knees in a pace that was a cross between a double and a quick march.

" Nothing else for the commanding officer, sir," said the sergeant-major, and saluted.

Outside, as Timothy was marched back under escort, it was quite dark. The stars were shining mirrored in the puddles which the rain had left about the barrack yard, and he had just time to feel a touch of comfort in their reflection, a link with a wider world which somehow understood things better, when the sergeant told him sharply to hold his head up, and they were back in the guard room again. He had a glimpse of a private soldier examining Rosalind's blue and silver earrings as they lay on the window-sill. Then the door slammed behind him, and he was left to wait for the hour of transfer to the cells.

## A CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER

“Ναυηγῶν τάφος εἰμί· σὺ δὲ πλέε· καὶ γὰρ ὅθ' ἡμεῖς  
ἀλόμεθ', ἀλλ' λοιπαὶ νῆες ἐποντοπόρουν.”

*(Epitaph from the Greek Anthology.)*

“I am the tomb of one shipwrecked ; but sail thou ; for when we were perishing, the other ships sailed on over the sea.”—(Mackail's Translation.)

JAMESON told me the story one night, when we were alone in his rooms in the Temple. I don't suppose you've ever heard of him—few but specialists have. I always feel that he might have been a great biographer. As it is, he has brought to the study of history an individual sense of values, a special love for obscure and lost, but essentially noble, causes. He is one of those men—I don't know if you would call them perverse—who take popular applause for a danger-signal ; and in consequence he has produced a mere handful of monographs on people, who would by now have been finally forgotten but for his researches—men and women, too, who reached, at least according to his measure, the highest achievements, but failed, for one cause or another, to win a full recognition of their excellence. I have always liked his work for the firmness and clarity of its style ; and I confess that the suggestion implied in it has always attracted me as a truth which, if partial, is generally overlooked—the idea, I mean, that if history is to be anything but “the gossip of the neighbourhood” it must be written not so much about kings and queens, nor even so much about

the common people, as in terms of individually remarkable men and women, whose absorption in their own work and probably the bent of their own characters prevented them from becoming popular figures.

Let me admit at once that by no means all of Jameson's heroes came to life in his pages. Sometimes there wasn't enough historical material to allow him to fill in the outlines sufficiently, and Jameson was not the man to supply imaginary colouring out of his own head. But no one could say that his central figure was not alive in the monograph with which this story is concerned—a paper which he called "*A Forgotten Captain*." That study is instinct from start to finish with an understanding and a vitality which, to me at least, make it stand out in relief from anything else he has written. I was always confident that the distinction which I felt between this paper and even the best of his other writings was not an imaginary one ; but it was not till he told me the story that night in his rooms that I understood what the difference meant.

I forget whether it began by my expressing a frank admiration for this particular study or whether it arose from some tentative interest that I happened to show in his methods. Few things fascinate me so much as the attempt to get behind any particular bit of work and to see how it came about in the mind of its creator. Somehow or other, at any rate, we fell to talking about the "*Forgotten Captain*," and when Jameson said reflectively, "Yes, there was a story behind that particular tale," I drew up my chair a little closer to the fire as a hint that I should like to hear it.

"It's a depressing story," said Jameson doubtfully. "Are you sure that it will interest you ? It's not too late to escape."

I declared my interest and my sufficient fortitude, and without further demur he began his tale.

“ It was an old report,” he said, “ that I chanced upon one day in the Admiralty Library that first put me on to my captain. It was colourless and reticent, as are all the best sailors’ reports, but I couldn’t help snuffing a touch of greatness in it, and I felt sure at once that here was a man whose memorial would be worth the writing. You know the story, for you’ve read my paper—how he turned the tide of battle and saved the day by leaving the line in an inspired moment, and then, resuming his obedience in a certain knowledge of his fate, took up his place again and went down, leaving another man to appropriate the honour and the reward of his deed. But when I came to look about for fuller material, there was astonishingly little to be found. I could hardly discover anything else about him in Admiralty records ; and at last I put aside the notes I had made in his case and went off on to another job altogether. It wasn’t the first time that a clue had led me nowhere—I’ve got a heap of similar bundles lying in that cupboard ”—he pointed to an old bureau at his left hand—“ and I don’t suppose that any of them will ever come to life now. But about a year after I had put aside my captain’s dossier and had given him up biographically for lost, I chanced one day to see in a window off Oxford Street what I recognised to be a miniature of him. I bought it for quite a small sum, and I got at the same time the address of its last owner. His name, I found, was the same as my captain’s ; and I wrote to the address that had been given me and asked if I might call, explaining my purchase of the miniature and the cause of my interest in it.

“ I got in reply a pompous and rather old-fashioned note inviting me to take a cup of tea with the writer on the following Tuesday ; and, on that afternoon, half-past five o’clock found me on the doorstep of a dingy house in St. John’s Wood. It was one of those houses that give you an immediate impression of disrepair and debt. The

front-door bell, I remember, was broken—I tried it three times, each more violently than the last, before I realised this, and then I saw there was a knocker and tapped on the door instead. Eventually an untidy servant gave me admittance and showed me upstairs. The furniture of the sitting-room, I could see, was a crowded mixture of the landlady's and the tenant's. There were all the usual things—stuffy plants, woolly antimacassars and spotted mirrors ; and besides these there were a few old prints on the wall, which looked as if they had come out of better company. On a table by the side of one of the uncomfortable arm-chairs was a French novel lying open, and beside it was one of those infernal, elaborately got up memoirs about some royal mistress of the eighteenth century. Both, I noticed, had come from a local circulating library. Turning round, I had just discovered a glass-topped table in the corner with a glimpse of family relics in it when the door opened and a faded lady, followed correctly by a gentleman well past middle age, came into the room. Both were carefully dressed in a compromise between the fashions of the day and those of thirty years ago. She, I should think, might once have been thought pretty, might have been, let us say, the belle of a garrison town. There were traces of a disused archness in the simper with which she greeted me. He, too, I should imagine, might once have been whispered of as handsome in the confidences of the circle of young ladies from which I pictured her as springing. Both of them shook hands with me in a style which reminded me of the form of my invitation ; and, while the lady sat down to arrange the teacups, I explained, rather more fully than in my original letter, the cause which had led me—somewhat unceremoniously, I feared—to approach them. Were they, I ventured to enquire, the descendants of my forgotten captain ? Yes, they were. And his only descendants, might I ask ? I thought I detected a note

of bitterness in the old gentleman's emphatic assurance that his daughter, whom I should see immediately, was the only survivor of his race. I wondered whether some other family of the same name perhaps contested his exclusive descent. But naturally, I reflected, it is hard for him to feel that the stock of which he is so proud has dwindled to an only daughter.

"A girl of perhaps twenty-seven, with a close likeness to her mother both in looks and manner, joined us almost at that moment, and, tea being ready, we all four gathered round the table. I can't recall much about our conversation, except that it was discontinuous and a little forced. I think the mother asked her daughter if she was going out to a dance that night, and the daughter replied that she was. I felt uncomfortably that the mother was perfectly aware of every detail of the outing before she asked, and only wanted to give me an idea of their social standing. It was brought out somehow or other that the girl either had been, or was to be, a flag-seller in the wake of some well-known society lady on one of those days which became such a plague in London at that time. Her father, if I remember, was inviting my pity for her because she had come out in a year when social life was so largely suspended by the war, and this flag-selling was quoted as one of the relieving features in her otherwise dull life. My host then expressed some platitudinous opinions about the war and steered the conversation through the shortcomings of our deplorable present-day commanders to the genius of their forgotten predecessors, and so to recollections of a dinner, which had been given a few years before on some anniversary of the man who had taken the credit of his ancestor's deed. The speaker, I gathered, had been obliged to write and ask for an invitation to this dinner, and then had been dissatisfied both with the place allotted him at table and with the complete lack of references to himself or his family which

had marked the eulogistic speeches of the evening. Nevertheless he extricated the menu-card of the dinner from a drawer and showed me with satisfaction the famous signatures upon it. Then, tea being finished, we passed to the glass-topped table and I was given further details about its contents and was handed a great wad of manuscript, which the old gentleman fetched out of a cabinet. This proved to be a life of his ancestor, which my host had written. I gathered that it had been submitted without success to all the publishers in London. Finally they placed in my arms a brown-paper parcel containing this biography, as well as a diary and some letters out of the glass-topped table, all of which I promised to regard as sacred and faithfully to return as soon as possible.

“ So at last I got away and came like a fugitive through the darkened streets of London down to Trafalgar Square. There the newspaper boys were selling the latest bulletins from France. The pavements were thronged with girls returning from their work, and the Strand was crowded with men in khaki from all over the world, come to see the sights and enjoy the pleasures of London. Here at least was life, and I, passing through their midst and clutching under my arm the old gentleman’s manuscript, felt as if I were coming from a mortuary with the corpse of a strange baby in a brown-paper parcel.”

Jameson leaned forward irritably and knocked out his pipe into the grate as he said this. And then, turning towards me with a smile :

“ All this sounds very unkind, I’m afraid,” he said. “ But I was in a bad temper that night, and the recollection of it still galls me. I don’t quite know why I was so angry, but I suppose that my conscience was touched just a little. You see, I too had been spending my time in trying to blow sparks out of cold ashes, and I daresay that I was vexed to find in that moribund household a

picture of my own soul. Then there was the contrast between the family I had just left and the man, at least as I had tried to imagine him, from whom it was sprung. That night I went through the papers I had brought away with me and found that they too, as I had feared, were all dead. The letters were quite worthless—mere formal letters of condolence written by friends to my captain on the occasion of his wife's death ; and I tied them up again impatiently and put them aside. I turned to the old man's manuscript and found that it was little but a recital, in a careful and tremulous hand-writing, of irrelevant family details. It traced out in dull and amateurish fashion my captain's ancestry, and it went on to give in considerably greater detail the family ramifications of his descendants. The story culminated in an autobiography of the writer, exposing whom he had married and where he had lived and providing for the insertion of a full-page portrait of himself at the age of twenty-one. I observed casually that he had had issue two daughters—‘ Winifred Theodora, b. Oct. 3rd, 1890, and Judy, b. May 13th, 1894 : d. July 27th, 1916.’ Then I had touched clumsily, I reflected with a certain remorse, on a secret wound, when I had asked unguardedly if I saw before me all the direct descendants of my captain. And for the first time, realising that tragedy underlay that entry, I felt a genuine movement of sympathy for the poor withered couple and saw a certain pathos in the old gentleman's attempt to greet me as an ally in his struggle for recognition. At any rate I wrote them as grateful a letter as I could compose, when a week later I put up the papers again into a parcel and sent them back to St. John's Wood, saying that I feared other demands upon my time would prevent me from making any immediate use of the material they had so generously placed at my disposal, but promising, if ever I completed a monograph on their ancestor, to let them see it in draft,

I had made perhaps a half-sheet of notes out of the whole bundle, and this I put away with the small dossier I already had, reflecting that I should probably never again disturb it from its pigeon-hole. Certainly, if the story had ended there my paper would never have been written. . . . Let's have a drink."

Jameson went across to the sideboard and brought out whisky and soda from a cupboard. He emptied his glass at a draught, while I sipped at mine ; and then, after refilling and lighting his pipe, he began again :

" Later on, you know," he resumed, " I gave up my literary work for a couple of years. More and more the sense had been growing on me—it was perhaps my one real obligation to that household in St. John's Wood—that I was playing about among cemeteries while all the world was at work ; and at last I went abroad on relief in Eastern Europe. One day in the winter of 1919, when I was at Warsaw, we got a mutilated telegram from a couple of women—a doctor and a nurse—who had been sent out into some typhus-stricken district on the borders of Russia. We couldn't reconstruct it entirely, but it showed clearly that they were in trouble. So I volunteered to go off and see what was wanted, and, taking a small supply of stores with me, I worked my way in slow and crowded trains close up to the war zone, where the Polish Army was facing the Bolsheviks in a frozen and lifeless country. Late one night I reached the town I was making for, and found my way to the house where our little Mission had established itself. An English girl opened the door to me and led me into a side room.

" ' The Doctor died this morning,' she told me, looking at me with tired eyes, in which I seemed to trace the half-formulated question whether I was going to blame her.

" ' Typhus ? ' I said.

" She nodded.

“ She was young—about twenty-six I supposed—dressed in an austere grey uniform. Her hair was cut short to the level of her neck ; and, but for her eyes, it might have been a boy that faced me with her hands resting on the table across the dark, shabby room. But they, tragic with weeping and desperately weary, shone in the half-light and dominated her white face and exhausted body. We looked at each other for several moments. I could not tell you to this day if she was beautiful. And then—‘ I don’t think I could have done more ? ’ she said, as though in appeal to me. ‘ I’ve nursed her every night since she was ill, and every day I’ve walked the country, trying to barter with the peasants for milk. Generally I managed to get a little, if only a cupful ; but sometimes, after walking all day, I failed to get a single drop. I bartered almost everything I possessed for it, and I was beaten. Tell me, could I have done more ? ’ she said.

“ You, who don’t know that people or that country, won’t be able to realise what that girl’s fight for her companion’s life must have meant. Half a dozen platitudinous answers to her question passed through my head ; but at last I kept silence and said nothing at all. I am sure, however, that she divined my sympathy, for I caught a quick gleam of gratitude in her eyes before she turned away and, burying her face in her arms against the wall, burst into tears. Later I persuaded her to go and rest.

“ We buried her companion next day. The Polish Commandant of the town sent four soldiers to act as her bearers ; but they came late, and the short afternoon was already closing in as we set off down the snowy street. Two women, the mothers of children she had befriended, went with us. Just outside the town, in the cold falling darkness, I recited such few fragments of the Burial Service as I could recall. But chiefly I remember how insignificant our small party and the rough coffin that lay

between us seemed in contrast with the vague menace of the chill, enveloping night, the flat and desolate vastness of that alien country-side.

"When we got home again I told my companion that I proposed to take her back to Warsaw. She acquiesced dumbly, very near I could see to collapse. That night she showed me what wanted packing and what we could leave in the town as a legacy of the work she had been doing. I sat up late, putting together the stores for our departure. In the morning she did not come down to breakfast, but the little servant of the house told me that Sister would like to see me. I went up to her and found that she too was sickening ; and neither of us could disguise from the other that her symptoms were those of typhus.

"It lasted for ten days. I nursed her myself, and though I think I did everything I could, my nursing of course was a mere travesty of the care she should and would have had if I had been able to get the right drugs and the right food for her. She was brave all through those days, treating her illness calmly, as though it were a matter of business between us two and death. Between herself and me there grew up naturally a considerable intimacy, that was overshadowed throughout by fate. For she knew, and I knew, that she was getting weaker, and on the tenth evening, when I brought her a cup of milk that I had found after a long tramp in the country, she lay back on her pillow and looked at me in silence for a while. I felt, before she spoke, what she was going to say, but the mode of it was characteristic.

"'My contract with the Mission is closing,' she said with a faint smile.

"'My dear,' said I, 'it's not ; it's not got to.' But I knew as I spoke that my words were in rebellion, not against the truth of her words but against fate. She knew it too, for without regarding my answer—

“ ‘ I should like to talk to you to-night,’ she said.  
‘ May I ? ’

“ ‘ You may do anything you like,’ I said rather roughly,  
‘ except . . . except break your contract.’

“ She made me no direct answer, but lying there with her eyes mostly on the window, but sometimes on me, told me quite simply the tale of her life. Typhus doesn’t leave you much strength for talking, but as she lay there, speaking in low tones, the wan shadows of a departing but still insurgent vitality came and went across her face.

“ ‘ I used to live at home before the war,’ she said, ‘ just the ordinary life of other girls like myself. I lived at home with my father and my mother and my sister—and a sort of ghost. Once there was a great man in our family, and he has haunted it ever since. He was a captain in the navy, and a brave man who never got his due. I suppose, when you can’t be equal to your ancestors, that it’s better to forget them, to realise that virtue has gone out of your race and to start afresh. But father never could do that. He lived for the old captain, as he conceived him. Everything we did was overshadowed by the thought not so much of himself as of the reputation which, father thought, should have been his, and that meant that we always had to pretend to be greater, more important people than we were. Even when I was quite a little girl and wanted to play in the garden with other children who lived in the same square I can remember my father forbidding it, and saying solemnly to my mother, “ *Noblesse oblige !* ” And it was just the same when I grew up and wanted to have work and a life of my own. Do you think there are many families strangled by a dead hand like that ? I often wonder.

“ ‘ When the war came even the small income that father had nearly vanished. So I simply had to do something, and in that way I got my freedom and went nursing. Father didn’t like it, but he couldn’t refuse any longer.

Fortunately my sister had always been his favourite, and she was content to stay at home. I found it a hard life after what I had been accustomed to. We had some dreadful cases, that still sometimes haunt me when I wake up in the night. But there was too much work for me to think a great deal about it at the time. And nursing has its compensations. At least you get to know the people you are nursing, don't you, better than you ever would have done if you had simply met them round a tea-table. I made friends of my own, and at last I fell in love with a boy I was nursing. . . .

“Presently he got well and wanted to marry me. There seemed no human reason why he shouldn't, for his father had plenty of money and liked me. But they were traders, and my father wouldn't hear of it. He gave me a long lecture about my debt to my ancestry and said that those who were untrue to their traditions always suffered for it sooner or later. Almost ever since I have thought that I was wrong, but at the time I obeyed him.

“The day of our parting came quickly, and we went to spend our last evening out in the country together. I couldn't tell you, even if I would, how that summer evening passed. You know how quick and significant the world becomes when you are moved; anyone who has been truly in love must know it. And that night there was not only love between us, but the doom of parting and the fear of death. I remember lifting my head to a vision of the sunset across a field of buttercups where we were lying—a view such as any mortal might have of a summer's evening, but a vision that comes perhaps once only in a lifetime. I remember the crackling of the little sticks under our feet as we wandered through a wood hand-in-hand—how ominous it sounded, like a prophecy of the breaking of love. I remember how tender and compassionate everything seemed; even the sprays that we parted about our faces

## 94 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

seemed to caress us as we went on our way. On that evening, I think, both of us had a vision of what life might be in this world, of what perhaps in another time it might even have been for us. But—he went off to France, and three weeks later he was killed. In the meantime father had disowned me and forbidden me the house.

“ ‘ Bereavement, of course, wounds different people in different ways. It made me defiant, made me stubborn to refuse all the usual consolations. I told myself that there was no life to come, and so put from me the comforts of those who hope in the next world to renew the relationships of this. I could see no glory in the war—for me it meant then the horrors of a hospital ward, as now it means the filth and starvation of this desolate country. I could not even persuade myself that my lover had died to save others. I had heard too many stories of lives stupidly thrown away without purpose. Nothing has supported me but my own work and a sense of bygone comradeship with a fellow-spirit. I suppose it was a sort of pride that made me want to throw away every rag of comfort. And this night, when my soul is required of me, if there should be any God to accept it, it is for pride above all that I shall need forgiveness.’

“ She looked at me, I thought, as in appeal for absolution. But I could only murmur clumsily that I had no virtue to judge or pardon the sins of others, but only a conviction that, if there was anything to pardon, that night it was forgiven her. She died a few hours later, and, after burying her by the side of her friend, I came quickly away.”

. . . . .

I said good night to Jameson and I walked home through quiet streets. He had told me the story, much as I have set it down, barely, grimly, almost coldly.

How few and insignificant, I thought, were the tangible memorials of that history—the faded official record of an old ship lost at sea, a neglected cross on the alien and desolate marshes of Poland. And yet, glimmering across my dark thoughts, I caught the vision of something precious and unconquerable,—of fortitude and endeavour in a lost encounter, of virtue mocking at its own defeat, encompassed like a small flame by the leaning darkness and bent by hungry winds, but kept precariously alight and passed from heart to faltering heart down the ghostly ranks.

## THE SILVER CUP

### I

I MET him first one March night in a farmhouse in Estonia, behind the Bolshevik front, and of that night I chiefly remember the cold. I was a war correspondent then, and had been spending a couple of days in an armoured train, when one evening, just about sundown, my host asked if I would like to ride out with him and have supper with the headquarters' staff of a neighbouring regiment. It had been a depressing day of snowstorms in which our men had failed to dislodge the Bolsheviks from a village a few miles ahead of our train, and I was tired of waiting in a stuffy railway carriage for an advance. So I agreed gladly, and soon found myself astride of a shivering pony, waiting for my host to start and watching a small fire which some of his men had kindled under shelter of a bank at the forest edge.

Oh ! but it was cold. There was an icy wind blowing as we cantered behind our guide away from the railway, uphill through trees and scrub. And when we reached the top of the hill it met us straight in the face. I felt my little horse quail before it as we came out into the open, and I drew down the flaps of my fur cap over my ears to save them from frostbite. Even so, my feet and my fingers were soon like ice and, if I had dismounted, I do not think I could ever have got up again. We struck presently into a forest track and into partial shelter from the freezing wind ; and at last, after half an hour's riding, emerged into a clearing set on a knoll, where a sentry in

a sheepskin coat stopped us and walked on with us to the farm. By a gate he showed us in the failing light two dead men lying almost concealed by the drifting snow. Bolsheviks, he said, caught running out of the farm when it had been taken a couple of days before. The head of one of them lay uncovered, the fine-featured face of quite a young boy. For a moment I wondered to myself how he could have joined that company. And then we were at the door.

Our escort knocked at the door and a guard opened it—a ragged fellow with a rifle. The door opened straight into the living room of the farm, and a knot of officers sitting at the table stood up as we entered. The wind blew the candle flames about their supper table, and the movement of the light half disguised their faces. Through a door at the back of the room I had a glimpse of a peasant woman, a girl and a very old man, peering out to see who the new-comers were.

The bearded Colonel of the regiment, a man, I suppose, of about forty, got up from the head of the table and shook hands with me. I repeated this formality—it is the way of the country—with all the officers present, and then sat down on the Colonel's right, where the adjutant made way for me. Dinner began, served by the women of the farm from the adjoining room. There were two bottles of potato spirit on the table, and from these we drank each other's health, eating meantime black bread and butter and some small fish, evidently a preserve from the sea coast. In the middle of the table stood a chased silver cup of fine workmanship; and on my remarking it, my host first pledged me with it, and then told how it had been captured from the Bolsheviks ten days before. It must be very old, he said. No doubt the Reds had looted it from the country house of some baron. Then, as the restraint of myself and my new companions melted, we began to talk.

" You didn't expect to find an Englishman here, did you ? " said my host.

I looked up, bewildered.

He indicated with a bend of his head a man sitting opposite me and to my right, who smiled at the introduction and bowed slightly and ironically. He was tall, with prominent cheekbones and light blue eyes set into a wide forehead, and above it a shock of tawny hair. He might, I thought, be about thirty-five years of age.

" Are you an Englishman ? " I said.

" Partly," he replied, speaking in English with a noticeable foreign accent. " My father was English, but my mother was a Russian."

" Have you ever been in England ? " I asked.

" Once," he said, " when I was a lad. I've been in most European countries in my time," he added, smiling.

" We must have a talk some day," I said in English, and then turned back to converse in Russian with the others.

There were sounds of a man knocking the snow off his boots at the door, and a rifleman with a sheepskin cap and coat entered and stood to attention inside the door. Again the flames of the candles bent before the wind, and I caught the eyes of the Englishman looking at me across the table, with a sense that he too, like me, was partly a spectator of what was happening. The other officers were helping each other to bits of meat and potato from a dish set down in front of us.

" What is it ? " said the Colonel to the new-comer.

" The Bolsheviks drove us out just before dark. We saw about twenty men, and they've got a machine gun."

" I'll go for them at daylight," said the Colonel. " We must go and see our men," he added abruptly. " Excuse me, but the Englishman will keep you company."

He and the officers filed out into the darkness. My riding companion went with them. The Englishman

and I were left alone. I went across and sat over the fire and the Englishman joined me.

"How did you come into this country?" I asked him.

"The Bolsheviks destroyed my home. They would have killed me if they could have caught me. I lived among them in disguise for a while, and then, as I was starving, I escaped along the coast and joined the Estonians. But there's nothing for a man to do in these parts now, except to fight somebody."

"And what's the end of it all going to be?"

"God alone knows!" he said. "As long as you treat Russia as a play, what hope is there for her?"

I laughed, and asked him what he meant.

"Before the war you used to pretend that Russia was a fairyland. Now you make out she's possessed by demons. And you're not even content to watch. You must take sides in the play, just as the crowd watching a melodrama will always cheer the hero and boo at the villain. And it's not for nothing that all the poor students in Moscow used to draw lots for the privilege of standing in the queue outside the theatre of a bitter autumn's afternoon. Treat us like characters in a play, and you may be sure that we're much too fond of the theatre not to play up to you, while the filth in the streets of Moscow will go on piling itself up until it reaches the first-floor windows. For Heaven's sake try the plan of treating us like ordinary human beings. I dare say we shan't enjoy it half so much at first," he ended up, laughing grimly; "but believe me, no nation can spend all its time behind the footlights and survive."

"Do you mean to go back to Russia," I said, "or shall you come to England?"

"To-morrow morning," he said, "I'm for the attack. What's the good of thinking about anything beyond that?"

## 100 THE DANCER AND OTHER TALES

And then his Colonel came in again and it was time for my friend and me to be gone.

I mounted heavily into the saddle, with difficulty supporting the weight of my coat. At the corner of the farm we turned to wave farewell to the lighted door. Then with collars turned high about our ears we followed our guide into the darkness of the open country. The wind had dropped and the distant stars shone faintly in the sky. The snow glimmered about us. The black fir trees rose solemnly from the snow. I had the vision of a vast and peaceful country, dotted miserably and insignificantly with the frightened hearts of men.

## II

It was early autumn before I saw the Englishman again, and I had settled down in Riga in some rooms I had found that looked past a warehouse on the river front towards the wooden bridge. I was living then in a flat that had belonged once to a Baltic nobleman, now fled to Berlin or overseas to Scandinavia ; and I had a single servant—a Russian girl with, I fancy, some Balt blood in her veins, whose home had been in Moscow. She brought me my meals and kept my rooms clean ; but we rarely talked. Once, I remember, when I spoke of the “ Englishman,” she told me some tale that had been current about him in Moscow—how one night for a freak he’d bought up all the tables in the Moscow restaurants, and then had dined in state with a single companion at one of them. “ The Madman ” they had called him in those days. It gave me a clue to his life ; but I did not make out whether she had ever known him personally. A Lettish officer, too, of my acquaintance spoke about him one evening as an outlaw on whose head three armies already had set a price. I gathered that he had left the Estonians and joined the Letts. But of himself I saw but little, though I ran up against him once or twice on the road, when I was wandering about the country among the troops. At those meetings I had little chance of talking to him, and, looking back, remember the setting of them rather than the man. I saw him, for example, early in the morning of the day on which the Baltic troops so nearly took Riga. All night long the retreating Lettish army had defiled back across the bridge and I, after standing for a while and watching the silent and

dispirited procession of men and carts, had lain down in my clothes for broken snatches of sleep, expecting any moment that the enemy would be in the town. Someone, however, set to and held the further end of the bridge. I could see, when from time to time I got up and looked out of the window, the flashes of rifle and machine-gun fire leaping into the darkness five hundred yards away across the river, and wondered how the fight was going. But afterwards no one seemed to know for certain who had been the hero of the night. Later, in passing talk, I heard the Englishman's name coupled with the exploit. But, when he came and knocked on my door the next morning, he told me nothing of the night or of the part he had played in it—only sat gulping down a hurried breakfast, silently and with a preoccupied air, and when he had finished, caught up his revolver and his steel helmet again and went out, with a muttered word of thanks, to rejoin his men.

Nearly a month later, I met him one day out in the country to the west of Dünamünde. Snow—the first snow of the year—had fallen in the night ; and the white earth, tinged with blue and with the long shadows of the brief day upon it, was hardly distinguishable at the horizon from the delicate blue of the autumn sky. I remember chiefly how strange the world looked that morning, like a woman in whom the donning of a new dress had pointed a noble and unsuspected beauty. As I was watching it from the corner of a wood, the Englishman passed me with a troop of Lettish cavalry, eager with the pursuit of the retiring Germans ; but I had no time to do more than wave my hand to him before he and his company were gone.

A few weeks later I came across him one night just in front of Mitau. They had told us in Riga that the German headquarters there had been captured, and I had pushed out in the hope of being early in the town.

I had ridden out to where a bridge across a frozen river had been blown up by the retiring enemy, and then had gone slowly forward on foot along the high road through the forest, with the red glare of a great fire glowing ahead of me in the sky. Just outside Mitau I came upon the headquarters of a Lettish regiment, and in the kitchen of the country house where they were established found the Englishman bending over a map in a company of other officers. He was told off, I learned, to take a report back to Riga, and I, finding that Mitau was still feebly holding out, arranged to go back with him. We spoke but little as we trudged back to the frozen river. The fir trees, dim and mysterious, stood ranked upon our either hand. From time to time there met us out of the darkness and the falling snow, men marching up to the front, silently, with heads bent forward and packs and rifles slung across their shoulders. But snow and darkness seemed to separate us from them, and I at least, in spite of my companion, was oppressed with loneliness. Both of us, I am sure, were glad to reach the river, where we mounted and rode back to Riga.

We crossed the Dwina bridge together, and then my companion went off with his report to headquarters, while I went straight to my rooms to prepare for the two of us. We had been fasting for many hours, and when at length we sat down to the table, we still talked but little till we had eaten a good supper and drawn up our chairs round the open wood fire with a bottle of Grand Marnier, which I had brought out from England, set between us, and the silver cup that had been given to me on the night of our first meeting, standing by its side.

“ Well,” said the Englishman, as he settled down into an arm-chair, threw his feet up against the stove, and, pouring it out, drank half a cupful of the liqueur, “ that’s finished.” And he put down the cup on the table with

a gesture in which there seemed to be no satisfaction, but only the embittered taste of despair. "I've fought those fellows," he cried, and he swept his arm in a circle to the east, "as I've fought the Germans and anyone else I could find to fight. But sometimes I've felt that if I stopped fighting for a moment, I should go through the lines and take my chance of being shot for the sake of joining them."

"You've deserved a rest," said I.

"Rest!" said he. "I can't rest." And I caught in his eyes a plain flicker of the same despair with which he had laid down the silver cup.

I refrained from adding another platitude, and waited for him to go on.

"Perhaps," he went on, and for a moment he smiled, "perhaps it's the curse of my mixed blood. I suppose you think that I might settle down in the town here now and take a pension, if this damned Government could afford it, and hang my trophies on the walls and buy some furniture from the Jews and marry and grow fat. . . . But have you ever seen children trying to run away from their own shadows? That's me—always trying to escape from the shadow of myself."

And he blew a great cloud of smoke out into the still air of the room.

I looked out of the window. Far away across the river the horizon was still red with the glare of burning farms.

"There'll be peace here now . . . perhaps . . . for a while. And about the ashes of those farms they'll try and build up an imitation of England, with officials and factories and trade unions, and a host of hungry Jews waiting as the grey crows wait on the Dwina ice to pick up morsels as it floats melting down. It may be it was all worth fighting for. It may even be that for a time they will seem to succeed. But that's a question that I needn't ask. I'm not one of your reconstructors. I

couldn't sit down peacefully in Riga and help to build all that up again. My father, you know, was an English doctor"—I didn't know, for he had never spoken in detail of his parentage before—"an English doctor, who left his practice one autumn morning and fled to Moscow with my mother. A home was destroyed when I was conceived, and I can never be anything but an instrument of destruction. My father died when I was fifteen, but I've not forgotten some of the things he used to read to me. There was something about bringing to the world not peace but a sword. There was something, too, about the poor inheriting the earth. I've wandered in my time and I've never come across a country yet that wasn't organised with the main intention of preventing the poor from inheriting the earth. And what's the result? All Europe east of the Rhine in hunger and despair, and west of the Rhine—towns like I once saw in Lancashire the only time that I visited my grandfather. Isn't it worth spilling the blood and destroying the happiness of a generation in an attempt to devise a better life than that?

"Do you know what it is to be always waiting for something to happen? I've always been like that; and when other men have been sitting and playing cards and smoking and making love and making money, something within me has always driven me apart to solitude, feeling that everything about me was unreal and that there was something yet to come. Often I've thought that it was my mixed blood that made me separate, that I was homeless, cursed, like the Jews. But now the whole world's homeless and I'm solitary no longer. All the breadth of Europe they're coming to meet me, leaving their cards and their women and their roubles, hurrying to join a force that they feel is becoming stronger. Look at those red fires in Courland! 'A few burning farms,' you'll say. Yes, but those few burning farms are the flares of

a dying civilisation. That's the signal that the world's been waiting for. And now it's given, be sure that the world will obey it, and march no one knows where."

He stopped, and taking a stick from the fireside, bent forward and lit his pipe. As he sat back in his chair, his eyes caught the silver cup on the table beside us.

"There's the curse of the world!" he said abruptly. "What's civilisation meant to us but the fear of those who drank out of goblets and the hatred of those who couldn't?"

We sat staring at the piece of silver, till he, seizing the bottle itself, drained the liqueur that remained in it.

"They told me," he said, putting the bottle down, "to go back with a message in the morning. Well, it's nearly morning already. But why should I rob of its privilege the one country that is left to put a price on my head?"

And with that, he sprang up and strode across the room to take up his belt and arms and to put on his greatcoat. I sat staring at the silver goblet. Outside in the cold I could hear the stamping of horses on the stones. Then the door shut. I heard footfalls on the stairs, a movement among the horses outside, the start of a horse being mounted; and then, sharp and diminishing, the steps of horses that moved away quickly down the street.

## THE DARK

IN the autumn of 1919 chance held me stranded for nearly a fortnight in a small town of Eastern Lithuania. I speak of it as a town because towns in those parts are scarce. In England, I suppose, you would call it a village, for it was little more than a collection of huts, grouped about an imposing Catholic Church of red brick, that reminded me always of a new toy stuck down in a gathering of old and outworn playthings. It was indeed a depressing spot, and I still find it hard to believe that mortal men could have achieved such overwhelming sordidness in the midst of so beautiful a countryside. In the few shops—nothing but stale foodstuffs or discarded clothing ; in the houses—dirt and darkness ; at the doors—slatternly women ; in the streets—ragged children, gossiping Jews and dishevelled poultry, with here and there a half-starved scavenging cur ; and everywhere—mud.

I had much time on my hands, which I spent mostly in walking about the country. It was a lovely moment of the year—the hour when the birch trees turn gold, before their leaves are dulled and stripped by the frost. They stood out, shining patches of colour against the dark setting of the pines, a splendid challenge to the oncoming winter. And in long walks over the fields and through the forests, by the riverside and by the shores of the little lakes that are scattered about that distant and luminous country, I gave myself up to a peaceful enjoyment, that came like a refreshing sleep after the strained and anxious years of war.

For at first I discovered hardly a sign of war in that secluded place ; till one day, penetrating a little beyond my usual excursion, I came upon the ruins of a castle, overlooking the river. It was evidently one of those old strongholds, scattered here and there across the old western frontier of Russia, and built by ancient conquerors for security against an enslaved people, which later, when the descendants of the conquerors had changed into feudal country gentlemen, had itself been transformed into a country house much on the English pattern. From the outside, at least from a distance, it still looked complete ; but, as I came up to it, I saw that all the windows were empty and sightless and the doors destroyed ; and, entering it, I found that little but the bare walls of its many rooms remained. All the furniture and fittings had been looted or destroyed to make firewood. Here and there stained and ragged fragments of tapestry or silk lay mixed with splinters and rubble on the floors ; while in a room, which had evidently once been a library, a few destroyed volumes lay in a heap of torn and disordered papers which had no doubt been tossed aside in a hungry search for money.

From the Baltic to the Black Sea there were then many such houses, and I myself had seen enough of them to know that nothing of any conceivable intrinsic value would reward a search in the debris. But in turning the heap of papers carelessly over with my stick my eye caught, amid many sheets of Polish manuscript, the sight of English words, and on looking more closely two fragments of old letters came into my hands. I do not think that they can have been chance fragments. I imagine rather that their owner had torn them out and kept them when the letters themselves had been destroyed. At least I could find no other traces of the same correspondence, though I searched the heap thoroughly before I left the castle. But the fragments that I found

were these—I think they must have been written in England :

*Have you ever stood by a pool in the rocks when the tide was coming in and watched the silent movement of the water and the swaying of the seaweed to and fro, till at last there came a wave that swept over the defending rocks and was through the pool suddenly in a conquering rush of white?*

*That's how you came into my heart.*

And the second :

*Dear,—It's wonderful at last to give my thoughts of you their release. Generally, when I have written to you before, I've kept them low-flying, like swallows before a night of rain. But this evening they are high in the air—high in pursuit of the memories of yesterday—quick, darting creatures fearless of any night to come.*

*Long ago we made a rule that our letters to each other should never be letters of fact, only imaginings. But to-night history's better than imagination. Someone must tell the story of yesterday, if the history of the world is to be true. And I am going to break our rules and tell it all over to you again. . . .*

That night, when I got back to my lodging, I asked old Kazys, who was my usual informant of the life and business of the village, about the house which I had found in my wanderings of the afternoon. From him and from some of the peasants who could talk Russian I got—hardly the story, but at least glimpses of the drama which had been played out within those desolate walls. Sometimes, you know, glimpses are more vivid than a detailed view. At any rate, when I had put together the fragments of history that I had thus gleaned and had spent more than one afternoon in the desolate castle, there came

gradually into my mind a clear picture of the story that had ended on the night when destruction visited the old house. Perhaps it did not happen exactly as I imagined, but I think that at least I captured the spirit of the event.

The castle, it seemed, had belonged to one of those old, wealthy, hereditary families who for centuries had held the great countries of Lithuania, Poland and the Ukraine. They seldom married outside their own ranks, and hence there were few of them that were not connected by ties of blood with the great proprietors of that wide borderland. They lived for the most part a life apart from the peasants, who had formerly been their serfs and who still supplied them with their wealth. In some cases they were on friendly terms with them, at least with those with whom they came into personal contact in their daily life. In others there was no human bond between them except perhaps their community in the Catholic faith.

In my castle there had been living at the beginning of the twentieth century an elderly man, who, disappointed of children, had come to live less and less upon his estate, and, after the death of his first wife, had spent most of his time in Warsaw, Paris, the Riviera or London. Then one day he had brought back to his castle a young wife—a mere girl they said in the village, and a foreigner, but of what people they could not tell ; and from that time, until the old man's death just before the war, the couple had spent all the summer and often most of the winter in the old castle. I could gather little of what their life together had been like. Seemingly it had not been greatly different in the eyes of the village from the ordinary life of the great landowner. Only now and then, from the conversation of one of the villagers who had been a servant in the castle during those years, I got a hint of some unusual quality in the mistress of the great estate. She had been fond of flowers, the young countess ; fond, too, of solitude, and seldom visited by the families of the

neighbouring landowners. She had been used, it seemed, to walk much about the forests alone, especially in spring-time and in autumn. Perhaps, they suggested—noting, I thought at first, that I also passed much of my time in this way—perhaps she had been an Englishwoman. Afterwards I attributed the idea to a tale one of them told me of a young Englishman who had come to the castle alone on a walking tour. They had seen him go up to the door one evening, and the next day they had seen her accompany him on the first mile of his renewed journey. That was all ; but there was a trace of slyness in the voice of the peasant woman who told me the tale that I resented as she spoke—something of the air of an eavesdropper at the door of a finer spirit than her own. They had an idea, too, that she had once been a singer ; there was the story of a boy who had heard her early one morning singing all alone in a clearing of the trees. And certainly such clues as I could gather seemed to show her the child of a southern race. They thought that she had not been too happy in her secluded life, especially as her old husband grew sick, when the long winter nights slowly followed each other and there were still no signs of an heir being born. But the most vivid memory I could secure of that past time was of a winter's day, when the old man had been carried out to his funeral in a procession that crossed the frozen river on a misty winter's afternoon and came to the village cemetery. I visited his grave once, and in a translation of his epitaph that was made for me seemed to detect a faint cry, a distant signal, as it were, of remorse, that added a touch to the picture of the young wife that I had painted from the words of the peasants who had seen her in their midst.

She in her turn, soon after his death, had ceased to spend much of her time in the old castle. At first, I think, she had tried, rather pathetically, to interest herself in the life of the village. But there had been difficulties

of language and misunderstanding. They were not accustomed to personal relations with the castle folk, did not expect them, and, dimly recognising her good-will, misunderstood and even suspected her attempts to get into touch with their life. I fancy, too, that the priest had been covertly jealous lest his own influence should be diminished in her favour. Gradually her overtures had ceased. Then the war came, and with it first the advance of the Russian armies and next their retreat before the German attacks. For two years the staff of a German brigade had taken up their quarters in the house, till at length they, too, in their turn had retired. And a few days after they had left, and before the Reds had had time to follow them, suddenly to the astonishment of the dazed village the lady of the castle had come back.

She had driven through the village street in a carriage, and by her side had ridden a man whom one of the old castle maids, who now again entered her service, recognised as the young Englishman who had visited the castle years before. No one knew from whence she came, returning to her old home. The priest had been doubtful what view to take of the couple, but later, apparently, his scruples had been set at rest. It was plain at any rate that they were lovers and that their ways differed widely from the old traditional manner of life in the castle. More than ever now—it was late autumn and the birches were all but stripped of their gold—she would be seen walking afield in the forests, but always the Englishman went with her, and generally her arm would be in his. I will not pretend that I got a clear picture of their life together. None of those who spoke of it could have painted such a picture, and indeed I did not seek to enquire. But it was evident that the closeness of their intimacy, their frankness and equality together, the confidence between them, and, above all, her supreme happiness, had struck those who had then been about her as

something new and strange in the history of the castle and in their own experience.

As suddenly as they had returned, perhaps a fortnight later, the end of their happiness came. Late one night a company of the Reds entered the village. Some of the peasants had armed themselves with rifles from the retreating Germans, and these "partisans," as they were called, had fired on the Bolsheviks as they advanced and killed a Commissar. The Reds came in with the intent of vengeance, and some of the baser elements in the village joined them. They took the priest, the school-master, the doctor, some of the land-owning peasants, who were pointed out by their viler neighbours. Among the latter had been a son of old Kazys, whose boy had run down the street holding his father's hand, till one of the Reds dragged them apart and hurled the boy into the gutter. All these men, with a few women among them, had been pushed into a cellar—I saw it myself later—and there hand grenades had been thrown among them. When all was silent in the cellar the Reds had gone off and drunk deep, and late at night, at the suggestion it must have been of some base drunken peasant, they had set off for the castle, shouting horribly of what they meant to do. They had caught Kazys's little grandson and made him show them the way. He was the only living witness in the village of what had happened.

They had come, it seemed, to the castle about midnight, a drunken, evil-looking brute of a Commissar at their head. Evidently the news of their arrival at the village had not reached the quiet house. They had knocked at the door, and upon its being opened by a servant had killed him with the butts of their rifles and rushed straight into the dining-room. The lady of the house and the Englishman were sitting at supper together. I think they must have been keeping some private festival together, for the countess, who generally

dressed simply, was wearing that night a magnificent robe. The boy noticed a pearl necklace about her throat ; and the table, he said, was gay with branches of berries. I think perhaps it may even have been the anniversary of his first visit to the castle. Exactly what happened I cannot tell. But it seems that the Englishman picked up a revolver and shot the Commissar as he entered straight through the head. "Farewell, comrade," he had cried out fiercely as the brute flopped forward dead against the table, and his blood spurted over the white cloth. And then before the others could kill him, "And to you, dear comrade, also farewell," he had cried, catching the girl to him and kissing her, and the next moment had shot first her and then himself. One of the Reds tore off the jewellery, the necklace and earrings, from her gaily dressed body as it lay clasped in the arms of the dead Englishman on the dining-room floor. Then they made a couple of peasants, who had followed them from the village, drag the three bodies out into the hall, and themselves sat down to consume the feast which they had interrupted.

There I would leave my story, not claiming to have lifted the curtain on the dark country whence it came. For the instruments of birth are not less terrible than those of death nor its processes less blind in seeming. Let us say, therefore, only that once upon an autumn evening in an old house of Lithuania perished a lovely thing.

## THE GAY MORNING

I HAPPENED to drop in for half an hour the other evening to see the display of early summer flowers at one of the fortnightly shows at Westminster ; and, as I was standing looking at a bank of azaleas, I heard a woman's voice beside me say :

“ I want that splendid orange-red one, Charlie. It'll just do to fill that empty corner of the spring garden next year.”

There was nothing in the words to attract my notice ; indeed, I had overheard such remarks more than once in my passage round the hall. But I turned because the voice was familiar ; and, turning, found myself face to face with a well-groomed man of about forty, whom I had never seen before, but who was unmistakably a country gentleman, had unmistakably once been an officer and who might also at one time of his life have done something else as well—been in politics, say, or merely been a man about town. And beside him stood a lady whom I recognised at once.

She knew me again, too ; for “ Ah, how do you do ? ” she said warmly, and held out her hand. “ I always count on finding at least one lost sheep at these shows. You don't mind my calling you that, do you ? I don't think you know my husband.”

“ On the contrary, I am flattered at being distinguished from the goats,” I answered, as her companion and I nodded with the freemasonry of those who judge each other to have been soldiers.

“ I've just found the azalea I've been dreaming of

every May morning for years," said the lady, pointing with her parasol to a glowing orange-red mass of blossoms in front of her. "Don't you think it's enchanting? Charlie's going to buy me two of them. You'd better go and get William to come and carry these to the car at once," she added to her husband, pointing to a great bunch of cut flowers resting on a chair by her side; and to me, "You *must* come and see a rhododendron I've discovered, too," she said. And she took me off to exhibit her discovery, leaving her companion to fulfil her order.

There is a kind of authority that is tinged with the disdain of disappointment, the authority of one who would rather have served, but whom circumstances have driven to mastery. However, it is an old vice of mine to build quick imaginary pictures of the relations between people that I meet casually; and I recovered myself with almost a sense of guilt from the momentary day-dream, in which I had read just such a disappointment into the tone of her brief command to her husband. And then her voice banished day-dream and question together.

"What a long time it seems since we met," said she; "and however did you recognise the crude schoolgirl of those days again?"

"I knew your voice at once," I said. "In that at least the change has not been so profound. Am I to take it that otherwise I am speaking to a different being?"

"Completely," she said, with mock seriousness. "I garden now and read books instead of haymaking and indulging in hill-top confessions. Don't you think I've managed the change rather successfully?"

"Evidently a most efficient performance," said I. She looked at me suspiciously with comprehension in her smiling eyes.

"I don't like your word 'efficient,'" she said ; "and I'm not a performer. That's not the way to describe a character that has unfolded itself like a flower beneath the sunshine of a successful marriage."

"I don't like your word 'successful,'" I answered. "It's not the adjective Shakespeare would have applied to a marriage of true minds. It implies an impediment safely overcome."

"Don't be so intellectual," she said, laughing. "What could be more impressive than the demonstration of obedience which Charlie gave you three minutes ago ?"

"It impressed me very much," said I demurely, "and branded you as a lion tamer of the first order. That's why I spoke of your efficient performance."

"Well, there's my rhododendron, anyway," said she. "Don't you think he's magnificent ?"

I looked at a wonderful deep red bloom set in dark green, glossy leaves. I praised its beauty and passed on to enquiries about her people.

"Muriel's married, you know ; and I think father and mother find it rather lonely. It's difficult for old people when all their children have left them, isn't it ? And yet I feel much happier at home when I go down there, than I ever did in the old days. Somehow marriage brings a girl closer to her mother. I used to think I was quite unlike all the rest of my family ; and now I find myself growing just like mother after all, and I see that really she may once have been just like I was that night we climbed up to see the sunset. Sometimes I'm glad of this ; sometimes it frightens me. There is a destiny in family resemblances. They come after one, as one grows older, like a band of blue policemen hunting down a thief."

By now we were back at the stall where she had found her azalea. Her husband was talking to the man in charge of the exhibit and she joined in the conversation.

" You've chosen the pick of the bunch, my lady," said the old grower to her. " But I hope you don't think you're going to see it flowering in your garden this spring."

" Thank you for your compliment to my horticultural knowledge, Mr. Busby," she answered, laughing. " By the bye, what's my treasure's name ? "

" It's a new kind this year," said the old man. " I hadn't given it a name yet. But perhaps your ladyship would honour me by letting it be called after yourself ? "

" No, no ! " said she quickly. " Don't let's desecrate the lovely thing ! " And a slight echo of bitterness in her voice made me look up at her. " I'd like to christen it, though," she went on musingly, staring distant-eyed down the hall ; and then suddenly—

" Call it—call it ' Gay Morning,' " she said with decision, and her passing eyes rested on mine.

" Brilliant," said I, and in that moment of christening we parted. I stood and watched them till they disappeared, marching side by side like prisoners through the shining ranks of the flowers.

• • • • •

I wondered that evening, sitting by my window and looking out into the London sky, whether she, too, somewhere in her country garden, was remembering our earlier meeting. I had been spending my holiday in the country with a cousin of mine, a doctor, and had gone up one evening by invitation to play tennis and have supper at the Hall. We had made up a mixed foursome—Lady Muriel, the elder daughter of the house ; some friend of hers who was staying there, but whose name I did not clearly gather ; young Larkin, a boy who was apprenticed to the agent of the estate, and I. I don't recall now how we played or who won ; but I know we

had several good sets, and I remember that supper was rather a disappointment.

And yet I felt that it shouldn't have been. I can still picture to myself the entry to the house, through doors wide open to the hot evening into a hall cool with black and white marble and decorated with a stone basin of nobly glowing flowers. Normally I should have been refreshed and stimulated by the contrast between that material beauty and the plain bleak house from which I was come. But, as it was, upon the very threshold something checked my appreciation as with a bit. I entered the drawing-room, and it seemed to me that the very mirrors, hanging upon the walls, that should have caught up so gaily the warm rich colours about them, were listless, almost reproachful, in their reflection. Sailors talk of an "unhappy ship," and I felt at once that I was in an unhappy house. I tried to assure myself that nothing was at fault but my own self-consciousness. Perhaps, I thought, we were after all an uncongenial company, and I a trespasser upon a life that I did not understand. The tennis, I supposed, had given us a common interest ; and, with that ended, the divergence between us showed itself again.

Dinner, I hoped, might relieve me from my embarrassment, but it didn't. Lady Muriel sat next to me, and her mother on my left. The daughter had just come down to the country from her first London season, and was inclined, I thought, to be spoiled. She was very young, of course, really, though her youth was already disguised by her air of the society beauty. We had laughed at each other across the net readily enough, but at supper all my conversational openings failed, and she took but little trouble to give me any in return. She turned to young Larkin and seemed for a while to get on better with him. But before long she had fallen back upon a desultory conversation with her girl friend across the

table—a conversation full of allusions by their Christian names to London acquaintances, whom I had never heard of. The boy made what I thought was rather a pitiful attempt to join in from time to time ; whilst I, a little nettled by my failure, turned and talked to the mother. She, I thought at first, was more sympathetic and interesting. She was evidently something of a reader, and began to talk of books that we had both lately read. But on that opening, too, a guillotine, as it were, descended. She froze up suddenly, as if she had caught herself forgetting a long-rehearsed part ; and I was left to feel that there was, or that at least there once had been, another woman behind the mask that talked with me. And all the while her husband sat opposite her in almost complete silence, his leaden eyes set upon the table in front of him and his glass frequently refilled by a footman in silk stockings who stood behind his chair.

I was beginning to imagine to myself what the relations between these people now were and had once been, when the younger daughter of the house came in. She had been harvesting on the home farm, and her skin, I remember, was tanned by the sun. She could not have been called pretty ; but I seemed to find, as I first set eyes upon her—her head was in profile, I remember, against the window, and her eyes reflected the light as she turned towards me—the promise of a strength and vitality in her face that reduced to insignificance the fluffy prettiness of her elder sister. But during the rest of the supper there was little in her manner to support that impression. Her mother made some rather sharp remark to her about being late, and the girl sat in stubborn silence, crumbling her bread between the courses. Her father looked up as she came in, but thereafter seemed to pay no further attention to her presence. Young Larkin made some attempt to engage him in conversa-

tion ; and as the meal went on and his glass had been filled and filled again, the old man seemed to come slowly to life and began to talk of what he had done when he had held some minor post in the Government. Once, I divined, he had had political ambitions, and had been disappointed. He spoke with an uncomfortable bitterness of his colleagues, and later with a furtive satisfaction of his own achievements. He seemed to regard himself as the victim of some plot, and I saw a certain pathos in the eagerness that evidently lurked behind the surly manner in which he sought to reflect his frustrated triumphs in that singularly cracked mirror, young Larkin. But perhaps my sense of pathos could not have survived a repetition of his memories. The lady on my left, at any rate, was plainly annoyed at her husband's recital, which all the time drew away her attention from her talk with me. Altogether, I was glad when she rose and left the three of us to our port.

I had hoped that the old man might prove a more cheerful companion when his wife had gone, for he must have noticed the vexation with which she had listened to his conversation with young Larkin. But I suppose that he felt in me a less sympathetic listener than the young land agent's apprentice. At any rate, he soon relapsed heavily into an almost complete silence, and once again I felt relieved when he proposed that we should rejoin the ladies on the terrace.

Coffee was waiting for us there ; and, if an oppressive sense of restraint still hung over us, the evening light seemed to make silence natural enough. It was pleasant to sit there smoking and to let one's eyes rest upon the smooth green lawn, that stretched away to a line of white balustrade, where cypress trees stood like watchmen before the clear pale sky. I had become absorbed in this view. It might have been a scene in the theatre that I was looking at, so much was its calmness and its

reserve accentuated by my sensation of awkwardness and unrest among the group in which I sat, such an estrangement there seemed to be between that lovely place and those who sojourned within it. And then the voice of the younger girl, who had been sitting beside me, and had hitherto said nothing, broke suddenly into my reverie.

“Would you like to come and see the sunset from the hill?” she said to me abruptly.

The others laughed at the *naïveté* and abruptness of her question; but I, glancing at her mother and catching in her face no sign of assent or discouragement, answered quietly that I should like it very much. So we got up and strolled away from the terrace together.

We could hear, as we went, a little burst of subdued and laughing conversation among the group we had left behind us—a comment, I felt angrily, without hearing their words, upon the strange ways of the girl by my side, perhaps, too, a malicious criticism of my own acceptance of her invitation. It did not escape her notice, for she flushed at the mocking sound, as we made our way through an iron gate between the watchful cypresses towards a track that led up through the woods on to the hill. At the edge of the trees our path ran along a little stream—a reach of smooth moorland water, passing so silently over brown stones that it would have seemed motionless but for the light occasional passage of a leaf spun swiftly by. At length we crossed it by a bridge, and our crossing, it seemed to me, marked for my companion a release. For, as we entered among the mounting trees—

“I hope you didn’t mind my asking you to come?” she enquired anxiously.

“On the contrary,” said I, “I am your debtor.”

She looked at me with a gleam of gratitude in her eyes.

"Dinner parties are dull, aren't they?" she went on more confidently.

"You like harvesting better?" I rejoined.

"Yes," she said simply.

"So do I," I answered, smiling up at her, and felt that she was my friend.

We climbed slowly upwards through tall beeches. Here and there in a clearing the slanted sunshine struck mistily through the trees. But for the most part our way was in shadow, till suddenly we broke through the edge of the wood and the golden light caught us in a flood. The girl ran on like a colt ahead of me, and for a moment stood dark against the sky, before she flung herself down upon the heather. I followed her slowly, and on the crest of the hill, sitting down by her side, found her staring dreamily at the view. A world of cloud and dark purple moorland lay before us, its streams and pools touched to bright silver by the sinking sun.

For a while she lay there, drinking in the wind of the hill-top; and then, looking round at me half eagerly and half doubtfully, as though to see if I should be shocked—

"Must all girls become prisoners sooner or later?" she asked abruptly.

"There was once a man," I answered, "who said that most of the people in this world had nothing to lose but their chains."

She looked up with quick understanding.

"I shall be one of those very soon," she said passionately. "Only a year ago Muriel and I used to come and sit up here together and make vows never to surrender. And now—you can see what's happened. Already she likes London better than the country; and, when she's there, she lies in bed half the morning and then gets up and dresses and goes out to lunch; and in the afternoon she dresses again and perhaps people come to tea. And in the evening she dresses up once more

and goes dancing. She won't go fishing with me any more ; she won't come harvesting ; she won't do anything. Next year, when I'm out, do you think I shall be the same ? ”

“ You see,” she went on after a pause, “ till now I've run wild and been happy. Nobody's bothered about me, and I've been able to go about alone, wandering all over the moor, working with the farm people and making friends with them. It's all been simple and natural. The people here have known me since I was a little child, and they've made me feel at home among them, just as if I was one of themselves. But already I can feel the change coming. Already I'm beginning to be the young lady from the Hall for them. They let me work with them still, of course, but there's a difference. They expect me to be looking forward to going up to London, and they can't realise how I dread it, how I'd give everything I possess for the sake of being able still to run wild and to work with them as a comrade. And so now, even when I'm among them, I feel lonely. It may be that I'm a coward, that there's something missing in me, that I ought to be looking forward. But I can't help feeling that they possess something that I am going to lose. They're happier, too, than we are, you know, I think.”

The faint breeze of evening, rustling across the heather, brought a distant sound of cheerful voices upon it. In the valley below on our right hand we could see the small figures of the harvesters following the last waggon, as it jolted homeward, heavy with sheaves.

“ They're happier than we are,” the girl repeated. “ I said that once at home, and everybody laughed at me. They called me a fine-weather farmer and said that I shouldn't like it quite so much, if I had to be out on the land in all weathers, cleaning out filthy stalls, wet through, minding animals. They think I do it as a whim or as a

picnic. But I'm sure the farm people are happier than we are, and I think somehow they're better. If I said that at home, I suppose father would think I wasn't a respectable girl any longer," she said, laughing ; " but you know what I mean, don't you ? Sometimes when it's stormy weather I rush out of the house and walk for miles and miles against the wind and rain, trying to join issue with life. But it's like fighting blindfold ; and when I come in again, they look up from their poker and think me just a fool for getting my feet wet."

The waggon in the valley went swaying out of the harvest field. A boy stayed behind to latch the gate and then set off at a run to catch up with his companions. Their voices grew faint in the lane and were lost.

Already the sun was dipping below the horizon. We watched its red disc sink below the moor, and, as it disappeared, the girl shivered.

" Do you believe in omens ? " she asked.

" No," said I boldly.

" Nor do I—really. But sometimes I can't help seeing a meaning in accidental things. Only the other morning, as I was going down the lane to the harvest field, feeling ever so happy, I passed an old man standing at his garden gate and said, ' A fine morning ! ' to him. And he called back, ' Aye—a gay morning—too gay a morning to last ! ' I can't get his saying out of my head. Why is it, do you think, that accidental words like that should have the power to torture one like a prophecy ? "

Somewhere behind and below us the stable clock of the Hall struck nine.

" Curfew ! " said the girl, and led the way down the hill. We descended as silently as we had come up, neither of us speaking till we were back by the little stream. And there, just before we entered the garden again, she turned her head suddenly and with eyes that shone in the darkness—

"I believe you understand," she said impulsively.  
"Oh, how I hope we'll meet again!"

• • • • •

We came back in silence to the party that still sat on the terrace ; and there I said good night and bore off young Larkin with me, though not before our host had insisted on his having a final whisky and soda. Of our walk home down the long dark avenue and out on to the glimmering high road, that led across the shoulder of the hill to the village, I remember little except that Larkin, never a silent youth, was exceptionally full of conversation or rather of soliloquy that evening. Fragments of it come back to me even now—"They always do you jolly well up at the Hall. . . . I like the old man. He's a jolly good sort really when you get to know him. . . . The mother's a bit of a towser, isn't she ? She's too deep for me. I suppose I'm not brainy enough for her." (This with a momentary affectation of gloom.) "What a topping pretty girl Muriel's become since she came out."

I was glad that we came to my door before he had time to extend his catalogue to the younger sister. But indeed, I am not sure if she would have been included, for I doubt if he had noticed her at all. It was left to me to remember her, when, a few minutes later, I leaned out of my bedroom window into the darkness to watch the light sickle of a moon of gold swung over the motionless trees—poised for the severance, I asked myself apprehensively, of what brave promise of happiness and life.

## THE NURSERY FIRE

IT was night in our nursery. Bridget and Nanny and I were sitting over the fire talking, as we often do, before we go to bed. And Bridget, as she sometimes does towards bedtime, was lamenting the days gone by.

“ How happy I used to be,” said she to me, “ before I ever thought of you or the little Cuinchy or Peaseblossom at all. I was free then, and had nothing to trouble about. Some days I used to dance and some days I used to sing, and some days I would do nothing at all. There was no housekeeping to think about, and no one to ask me if I had done this or remembered that. But now all day long I must be either working or thinking. And soon I shall be an old woman, and I shall never dance again.”

It was time for Peaseblossom’s supper. Nanny went away to fetch her, and presently returned with our baby in her arms, that rubbed her eyes with her little fists in protest against the breaking of her sleep. But soon she was in Bridget’s arms on the other side of the fire, her head bent below Bridget’s bended head, drinking up her warm evening milk from the red cup with round white spots upon it that had come to her sister as a present from France.

I looked round our nursery. There was the great table of firm white oak that once had stood in our farm. There was the oaken dresser, still looking down upon it, with the plates painted each with a yellow-breasted bird in merry rows upon its shelves. The windows, hung with striped curtains of red and blue and gold and black, were covered safely against the night ; and between us

was the small chair, of birch and ash well fitted together, that the little Cuinchy is accustomed to sit in at her play.

I looked round our nursery, and as I looked there came into my mind suddenly the picture of another life that I had known.

“What are you thinking of?” said Bridget to me.

“It is a strange thing,” said I, “to remember in a happy nursery like this. But my thoughts were away to a winter’s morning with men standing to arms before dawn and the snow beating and driving about them; to a winter’s dusk, where men stumbled across an open field in France, a company diminishing as the bullets whipped by into the night. I was thinking, too,” said I, “of a sight that I saw only this evening—women and children standing in a frozen street, hungry and waiting their turn for food.”

Peaseblossom’s milk was finished now. She called at first to Nanny, and then she sang what her mother calls “The Song of Peaseblossom,” beating her arms up and down in time to that music of her own. She laughed at a shadow of a dog’s head that I made for her with my fingers on the wall; and then Nanny took her out of Bridget’s arms and wrapped a shawl about her and carried her away to sleep in the bed with cane sides that she has inherited from the little Cuinchy, her sister.

“I would never have thought,” said Bridget, staring into the fire, “that such things could be in the world together as this nursery where we are sitting and that field and that street of which you spoke. One of them, I am sure of it, one of them, indeed, must be a dream.”

And Bridget rested her head against the firm oaken table as though to be sure that it was real.

“Poor Peaseblossom!” said Bridget. “I ought not to pity myself. For I at least in my time have had my full of merriment and song. I ought to be pitying rather the little Cuinchy and Peaseblossom my baby. They have

not had in their lives even an hour of singing or of dancing. For one could hardly call 'The Song of Peaseblossom' a real song or the steps which the little Cuinchy dances to the musical-box a dance like those I used to know. And now I fear there may be no occasion for dancing or singing till they are both old like me."

"I am more hopeful," said I, "than that. Peaseblossom, I vow, shall dance and the little Cuinchy shall sing before the new mulberry tree in our garden has borne a single fruit. But perhaps," said I, "for both of them there are other things in store. We were speaking just now of our nursery and of those pictures I was remembering—of men fighting and dying in France and of women hungry in the streets. And you were saying that surely one of those things must be no truth but a dream. Perhaps ; and perhaps it may be for our babies in the coming days to determine which of those pictures is to be the dream and which of them the truth. And now there is but one prayer to be said—a prayer that our Cuinchy and Peaseblossom and all the company of children who to-night by a thousand fires have drunk their warm milk and are asleep, choosing between truth and dreams, may make their choice aright."

Bridget said nothing in answer. But I think the same hope moved our hearts as we stared at the shining fire.

## THE PROCESSION

NOT long ago Bridget and Nanny and the children and I stood upon a balcony to see Marshal Foch go by. We hung out a big tricolour flag in front of us, and, while we were waiting, Peaseblossom and the little Cuinchy played hide-and-seek in and out of the windows. Presently to the south of us we heard distant cheering. In the Park, a hundred yards away, officers of a Guards regiment shouted their words of command down the line, and, company after company, waiting ranks of soldiers sloped and presented arms. The procession came by : first a scarlet figure on horseback, with two troopers at his heels ; then two carriages, and a small escort of cavalry following in their wake. The eyes of Peaseblossom and the little Cuinchy were fixed upon the scarlet outrider. Bridget and I watched, instead, a small figure in blue uniform seated in the first carriage. Our family, all with different voices, cheered from afar. A few minutes after he had gone by the spectators scattered, the soldiers who had been lining the road began to close into two ranks, and we turned back from our balcony into the library behind it. That was how for us Marshal Foch came to London, a small and distant blue figure, travelling through lines of what might have been toy soldiers keeping his road. I suspect that if the little Cuinchy or Peaseblossom remember him at all it will be as the scarlet lackey who rode in front of his carriage that December afternoon.

We came back—Bridget and I and the children—to Peaseblossom's birthday tea in the nursery. Roger came,

too, with his mother, and Tommy and Teddy and Betty with theirs. Nanny sat at the end of our great oak table, with Peaseblossom by her side ; and in the middle stood Peaseblossom's birthday cake, with two little candles burning upon it, and all about the table were crackers of red and white. We ate our bread and butter and jam, and we ate each a slice of Peaseblossom's birthday cake ; and then we pulled the crackers for toys and for caps. The gay curtains in front of the windows held back the invading darkness as we sat in the comfort and security of the quiet and lighted room.

Then the children said their graces, and we went down hand-in-hand to the drawing-room. And there we played games together—"Nuts and May" and the "Mulberry Bush" and "Oranges and Lemons,"—and sang "Looby, Looby" in a ring ; till the children began to dance together with steps of their own to Bridget's playing. Roger, in his golden dress, was their leader ; Roger, with his deep, shapely head that reminded me of his dead father, a friend of old and a brother officer of mine. And I sat down in the corner, and as I watched them I thought of other things.

I thought of that small and distant carriage, travelling quickly through the Park ; and it seemed to me that already the war had diminished and become unreal, like a dream abandoned at morning. How much had vanished with it. Emperors and kings, old customs and friendships were sweeping past us like broken ice in a river released by the spring. I remembered days before the war when I had met together for nights of feasting and gaiety with friends whose sightless eyes would never look on England again ; when the comradeship between us had seemed secure and hardly less permanent than the grey and ancient walls which hedged us about from the world. How different had the issue of that life been from its confident beginning. And how safe now seemed

the lighted room, with Bridget sitting at the piano and the children playing about the floor. Was this life, too, no better than a dream, doomed also to change and swift dissolution? Might this not be a relic of a bygone security, the end of a momentum begotten of old customs which would no longer in the future be strong enough to bear it on its course? All the world now, I thought, stood upon the threshold of darkness, and one could but wish for those dancing children that their hearts within them should be true to themselves and to their fellows. For now to no man born into the world was there a call to any certain future. They were stayed but for a moment upon the edge of the unknown, waiting only their turn to answer to the challenge of a world reforming—"Tout le monde au poste d'écoute."

By now Bridget was playing "Rosemary's blue, Lavender's green," the children's favourite dancing song. Peaseblossom was running round the room with leaps and scurries, calling to us from time to time to see how well she went. Betty and the two little boys were marching hand-in-hand, singing fragments of the song which Bridget was playing and improvising a measure of their own to her accompaniment. But the little Cuinchy was dancing alone. Her head was thrown back and her small feet moved ceaselessly in union with the music. It was plain to see that she was dreaming, and her little arms were outstretched as though in a welcome to none that was with us. Something, it seemed to me, in the very play of the children had broken through the security of that lighted room; and I sat watching them in silence, dancers into an unknown world.

## THE LITTLE MAN

IT was New Year's Eve. Outside the brief London day was ebbing ; but pools of white light, as though left by its withdrawing tide, still rested on our polished oak table and glimmered on the arms of our wooden chairs. Bridget, with Timothy, our little son, upon her lap, was sitting opposite me in the wonderful chair that I found not long ago in the gates of Russia and shipped home in a friendly man-of-war. It is a tall rocking-chair, painted black and decorated with golden flowers and leaves and stars ; and I never knew a chair that combined with so much gravity and stateliness such a kindly promise of cheerfulness and movement.

In this chair Bridget was sitting ; and, as she rocked to and fro, the pale light caught and gleamed in her long necklace of Baltic amber, that was clutched in Timothy's little hands, and she sang to the rocking of the chair :

“ Tim my baby's a tiny man—  
*Rock down, rock up, as high as we can.*

Now he's little, soon he'll be old—  
*Rock on, my chair of black and gold.”*

There was a faint scent of burning plane tree leaves in the air. That scent and the white light of evening never come together but my thoughts slip back through the intervening years. I was seeing myself at that moment as a little boy in a holland smock standing up on a chair against the nursery window and gazing into the November twilight, while outside the bell of the muffin man was

coming nearer along the street, and behind me, over a red fire, my nurse was toasting bread for tea. And I was wondering to myself how much difference there was between me and that small figure framed against the falling darkness of just such a London evening as was now descending upon the streets. But after I had been silent among these questioning thoughts for a little while, and before I had been able to answer them, Bridget checked her rocking for a moment and asked me what I was thinking about. There is an old agreement between us that it is always fair to invent an answer to this question, and so, boldly inventing, "I was picturing," I answered, "the Timothy of the future ; and I was seeing in my mind's eye a gentleman in a shiny top hat and an over-coat with a velvet collar, walking with his tidy wife and his prosperous children in Kensington Gardens—a party respected by all observers."

"I had hoped," said Bridget, "that you were making good resolutions for yourself instead of indulging in vicarious hopes for our children. And as for the wish that you have described, it may be a good wish or it may be a bad one, but I am quite sure it is not what you were really wishing."

I reflected for a moment on Bridget's words before I answered.

"To tell you the truth, Bridget," I said at length, "for many years now I have made good resolutions on New Year's Eve, and I expect that you have done the same. Moreover, if one is to believe what one reads, not only you and I, but also the people that live in the houses to right and to left of us have done the same ; and not only they, but men and women, both like us and unlike us, who live in other towns and in other countries. What might have been the fruit of those resolutions, truly acted upon ? And to what end in fact have they all come ? Of that I know something, having travelled, since the

guns fell silent two years ago, in so many of the countries of Europe ; and of that, too, the black and golden chair, in which you are rocking, could perhaps, if it could speak, tell a tale even more bitter. For that chair, as anyone may see, was built in a day of leisure and gaiety ; but now death and destruction have visited the city where it was made. This at least is certain, that many of those, who were so resolved to mend their customs, are now dead before their time, or so unhappy or poor or sick or starved as to be incapable of any new resolution whatever. So I was thinking that perhaps the time had come to be more economical in resolutions as well as in other things ; and that, instead of indulging myself in the luxury of vain intentions, it might be better if I tried to-night to frame a wish for Timothy, our little son."

" But," said Bridget, " is it possible to frame wishes for an unknown child, and isn't Timothy still quite a stranger to us both ? You, I expect, think that he is a small image of yourself, as I often hope that he is a little copy of me. But here he sits on my knee, and not a word can he say of what he is thinking about ; and in reality he is probably something quite different from either of us. Then how are we to know what it is useful to wish about him ? "

Timothy sat watching me with wide and solemn eyes, and I stared back at him in perplexity, so mysterious did he suddenly appear to me ; till Bridget, encouraged by my silence, threw another question across the stream of my thoughts.

" I often think, too," she said, " that fathers and mothers make a mistake in fancying that they are so important to their children and can determine what they shall be like by wishes or in any other way. Have you ever heard the story of the two swallows who, while their companions were darting hither and thither over a stream below them, chasing up and down after the mayfly, sat

solemnly on a telegraph wire congratulating themselves on the importance of the messages that they were speeding along it, and comparing themselves favourably to their careless companions, who were spending the day in the pursuit of flies? Don't you think, perhaps," said Bridget to me, "that when we picture ourselves as influencing Timothy's future, we may really be just like those silly birds on that wire?"

"I know," said I to Bridget, "that Timothy is really a stranger to us both, and I dare say that it will be in vain if we seek to determine what he shall be or do. And yet . . . I still think there is virtue in imaginings and wishes. And though I have been much away lately in foreign parts and in solitude, it may be that I know now, better than I did, what it is really worth while to wish. Here at home, if I go out of doors, all the voices of my heart are overborne by the rush and noise of the traffic, and all the pictures of my mind are clouded by the sight of anxious faces and squalid streets. Here, too, there is a deafening clamour of those whose leadership depends on the noise that they can make. But there, by that frozen and distant sea, where the difficult winnings of generation upon generation are passing away like drifted smoke, men look across sometimes at England, as those that pass along the dark pavement outside will look into a lighted and a cheerful room. There, indeed, I have sometimes thought that, just as many an Englishman hides his feelings behind a cold and hard face, so England herself is apt to hide her heart behind men that do not understand her, behind words and even actions that are not her own. And yet one can see that behind those words and those actions somehow the true England still persists—a land of men and women fierce and impatient against tyrants, kindly to each other and great-hearted towards the weak, lovers of tradition yet quick and courageous in invention, the guardians of a noble liberty and the inheritors of a noble speech."

"I don't quite understand what all this has got to do with Timothy's future," said Bridget ; and she fell again to chanting the song of the rocking-chair :

"Send him gentle, but send him strong—  
*Tim and I go rocking along.*

Send him afar but bring him back—  
*Rock on, my chair of gold and black.*"

"Some day, perhaps," said I, "the goodness of God will send us as a leader an Englishman who shall contain in his own heart all those true and splendid qualities of England ; and if by some magical chance Timothy should prove to be such an one, then for you and me there would be no more room for wishes. But at any rate let us decide that we would rather have our Timothy grow up into a true Englishman than into one of those behind whom England hides her spirit and her heart. To the making of such an one there must many qualities conspire. But to-night, since Timothy is still so little, and since only last week we were singing carols about another child, who was born nearly two thousand years ago, let us pray for one thing only and ask that he may keep . . ."

At these words I stopped, tongue-tied and a little ashamed, for it came into my mind that, in trying to frame a wish, I had come very near to a sermon. Darkness, while I was speaking, had drained the pale light from the chairs and the table, and I could hardly see any longer Bridget or Timothy or the amber necklace. But it was Bridget who broke the silence, the chimes of her voice falling quietly through the darkness as she sang :

"Wherever he goes, bring him back at last—  
*First we rock gently, then we rock fast.*

Keep him a child through foul and fair—  
*O rest you, rest you, my golden chair.*"

And again the closing words came chiming even more softly :

*“ O rest you, rest you, my golden chair.”*

Just as the rocking of the tall chair was stilled, Nanny opened the door and crossed, a white figure through the dusk, to where Bridget sat. She bent down to take our little son off to bed ; and—“ The little man ! ” she said, and again, as it were compassionately—“ The little man ! ” Timothy crooned happily and sleepily in answer and, climbing up into her arms, buried his small face against Nanny’s breast. We heard him pretending to talk to her as he went upstairs to meet his second New Year.

## THE DESERTED NURSERY

THERE was silence in the house. Usually of a morning the staircase rings with the voices of children as a wood with the callings of the birds. But now the little Cuinchy and Peaseblossom and Timothy were all departed, and our house was emptied of its folk. Bridget and I ate our breakfast in a strange stillness, and afterwards, by force of habit, I climbed to the deserted nursery. So must have appeared that palace of the old story when the spell of sleep was first cast upon it. The nursery clock was ticking away bravely upon the mantelpiece. Timothy's horse, as though arrested in full career, stood bemused in the middle of the floor ; and Peaseblossom's doll sat limply in a corner of the sofa, where she had been placed at bedtime the day before the children left. Their last drawings still stared from the blackboard across the empty room. Their little coats and gowns hung motionless in the open cupboard. All the various creatures—lions and squirrels, ducks and bears and men—that scamper so merrily round the carved dado of our nursery seemed that morning doubtful of their courage. Even the brave yellow-breasted birds that sit in a row upon the children's plates looked down from the great dresser spiritless and perplexed. And the common sounds of daily life that penetrated with unwonted clearness into the silent room—the harsh rhythm of scrubbing on the kitchen stairs, the cry of the old man hawking " wild rabbits " down the street that would have drawn the children to the window had they been there—did but render more poignant the uneasy sense of desolation about me.

Into most hearts, I suppose, upon a time may enter cloud-shadows of unreasoning apprehension, when even the rustling of the grass is dreadful. Lamb excepted from their company "the brain of a Caledonian," and it may well be that the careful spirits of Scotsmen are not lightly overtaken far from home by his "twilight of dubiety." There were many Scotch boys at school with me ; and I think that it was rather an envious admiration of their native self-confidence than any mere desire to choose the winning side that tempted us, the timorous children of a more complicated stock, painfully to review our family archives for the least trace of a Scottish inheritance whenever the game was called for "Scotland against the world." But even in those days I was never shameless enough to pretend to Scottish blood ; and here, in the deserted nursery, no unsuspected ghost of kilted ancestry rallied to my comfort. I knew well that in a day or two the voices of the children would be heard in the nursery again. And yet with me, in that instant of time, it was as with the solitary rider when—

"down behind the cottage roof,  
At once, the bright moon dropped."

For a moment I was with them of whose little town the ways, once noisy with childish footfalls, will now for evermore be silent, whose children partake the incom-  
municable sleep. For a moment, too, I travelled in the shy company of those whose little ones may creep about them of an evening but are yet for ever "nothing, less than nothing, and dreams."

Bridget it was, joining me in the nursery, that withdrew me, almost before I had set out, from that voiceless pilgrimage. "Do you think," said she, "that it will be like this when we are old and the children all gone out into the world ?" It was difficult to answer her. Therefore I did but busy myself in silence with some small

adjustment of the great chest which I had lately built for the nursery.

The next day the children came home again. I heard Peaseblossom's ringing voice first upon the stairs ; and presently I went out myself to Kensington Gardens to meet the little Cuinchy on her way home from school. There was a touch of unmerited relief in the pleasure with which I spied her little primrose hat advancing demurely up the Broad Walk. Last of all Timothy came back from the country, just as bright and bold as when we had all stood on the doorstep to watch him drive away. I sat upon the nursery sofa and listened to the story of all that they had been doing. And when their tale was ended I rested there ashamed, reflecting how large was the measure of the world's true sorrow, and blaming myself that I, who had as yet so lightly escaped that toll, should have given sanctuary to such wayward apprehensions. Never yet for us, I remembered, had the spring been taken out of the year. And in penitent token of this I gave to Timothy a snowdrop and to the little Cuinchy and Peaseblossom a sweet-smelling white violet apiece which the old keeper, who lives by the farm that once was mine, had entrusted to me the night before to bring back to them from the country.

## GREATHEART

GREATHEART lay in Nurse's lap. He was dressed in a long linen nightgown that was tied across his small body by two streamers in a bow ; and beside him was his wicker cradle, just like the ark of bulrushes in which little Moses floats in the picture while Pharaoh's daughter bends to gaze at him through the tall, parted reeds. There he lay, peering with puckered eyes at the dangerous world into which he had leapt only seven days before.

I cannot think that it seemed a very perilous place to him. For a squadron of bold tulips were keeping watch in the room ; while outside, in the square, hawthorn and laburnum were blowing, and all was quiet save for the voice of a thrush chanting his evensong in the heart of the garden. Yet Bridget, who was sitting back against her pillow decorating a straw hat for the little Cuinchy with diminutive rosebuds, laid down her work suddenly and—"Poor Greatheart!" she said tragically. "The earth, I think, is too full already."

For seven days I had refrained from arguing with Bridget for fear lest she should be tired by discussion. But to-night it was evident that her strength was coming back, for she went on :

"What brought the war," said she, "but too great a press of men in the world?"

"Perhaps," I said, "they were the wrong sort of men, or were persecuted by their masters, or falsely led by their kings, or lived in houses without gardens. On the contrary," said I, "to me upon my travels it has lately

seemed that the world was crying out for men, and that never was a greater need of such as by act or voice or wisdom could help their fellows to live and work peaceably together. And is there any limit nowadays to what a man may do ? Only the other day I was hearing that if one had but sufficient knowledge he could discover power in a penny piece of chalk to lift a whole ship into the air, not to mention much more useful tasks than that."

"I fear," said Bridget, "that Greatheart will be nothing but a little gardener."

I looked up to see what had given her this idea, and found that Greatheart's eyes were fixed on a window-box, which I had planted close by Bridget's bedside. There was Greatheart staring at the blue pansies, and the blue pansies eyeing Greatheart in the friendliest way you can imagine.

"Then a gardener let him be," said I. "Did any man in England grow more famous roses than your own grandfather ? And have you forgotten that, if league upon league in the heart of Canada the wheat stands foot-high this evening, it is chiefly because a clergyman of Galicia watched the habits of peas in his garden not a hundred years ago ? And let us not suppose that such discoveries are always reserved to some Pole or German or Finn. On the contrary, it was Milton himself who asked, when God intended some new and great period to begin, 'What does He then but reveal Himself to His servants, and as His manner is, first to His Englishmen ?' Of that much surely we may remind ourselves, without being impolite to foreign people ; and, if we are not yet at one as to the measure of Greatheart's infant beauty, it was only yesterday we were agreeing that at any rate his face was of a truly English type. Who, therefore, is more likely than Greatheart to make two blades of grass grow where one grew before ? "

Bridget made no attempt to answer this question. Possibly I convinced her, or perhaps she was merely tired. But it was well that she had not spoken, for into the peaceful twilit room came the voice of the thrush in the garden, singing two verses, one after the other. And when he had finished I translated them for Bridget thus :

*“ Was ever year  
That could dispense  
With faith or courage,  
Wit or sense ;*

*Or lack of room,  
Since time began,  
For yet one more  
True-hearted man ? ”*

“ I didn’t hear Thrush calling in quite such a monotonous way as that,” said Bridget. “ I believe that you invented those words, and that really he was singing a song about worms.”

“ Oh, of course,” said I, “ I was only giving you a free translation. But there is a great deal, nevertheless, to be learned by the divination of birds, as the ancient Romans well knew. One of the happiest men I ever met could tell the voices of all the birds in England. And even Mr. Gay, who wrote in his own epitaph that life was a jest and that now he knew it, derived a special lesson for parents from the fowls of the air. For did he not tell us through one of his characters—

*“ In constancy and nuptial love  
I learn my duty from the dove.  
The hen, who from the chilly air  
With pious wing protects her care,  
And every fowl that flies at large,  
Instructs me in a parent’s charge.”*

Again Bridget did not answer, and once more we rested silent, waiting for the voice of the thrush. Presently he began his lovely call again. This time he was sitting on a far-distant tree, and his notes fell so softly that I was not sure of their meaning. But certainly it was not a dirge that he was intoning ; and what else should he have been singing but a cheerful and encouraging salute to little Greatheart, before they both fell asleep, Greatheart in his cradle and he on his bough ?

## HEROES

THERE are few subjects that Bridget and I have explored so often or with such diversity of argument as that of heroes. Only the other day we were disputing over a play that I had started to write for the children, in which I had made a fairy-struck nurse the heroine and a lamplighter the hero. I was telling her how my lamplighter tried to bribe his lady-love to leave the fairies by promising her in a song a silver hat and a pair of scarlet shoes, and how at first she was disdainful, but at last relented and gracefully answered him :

*“ O my love, my love is blinder  
Than fairy lovers be,  
But my love, my love is kinder  
Than the fairies were to me.*

*In all the breadth of England  
What lady but would choose  
To dance with her lover in a silver hat  
And a pair of scarlet shoes ? ”*

I thought Bridget would like these verses, for which I had also prepared the music, and would appreciate in particular the cleverness and generosity of the lamplighter in proposing to his lady a gift so much more pleasing than those which we had sometimes seen guarded by detectives at fashionable weddings. But I found that she thought a lamplighter unfitted by career to be the hero of a play, and on this ground alone condemned at once my song and still more my tune. Nor

was she altogether satisfied when I offered to discover the lamplighter in my last act as a brigadier-general in disguise.

But that was a special case. In general, when we argue the subject, she opens with one or two principal gambits. Either she will insist that I have no heroes, or else she will paint the world as full of heroes, whom she has never met. And, when she chooses the latter opening, she will usually hint that it is among my duties as a husband to provide heroes for her inspection. To these two separate lines of attack I have by now elaborated a variety of answers, which I adopt according to the sweetness of my temper at the moment, and with a due regard to the dangers of excessive repetition. Sometimes I merely assume a far-away look, as though this was a difficult and a spiritual question which she could hardly be expected to understand. Occasionally I find it an effective riposte to enquire briefly where are the heroines, whom she would invite to meet them, if I were to bring back a bevy of heroes to dinner. Or I tell her a story of Tolstoy : how, when he was old and sick and was travelling back from the South of Russia to Yasnaya, his home, he went to rest in a garden by a railway station ; and how a lady came and drove away the old man in his sheepskin coat and his shoes of lime-tree bark, asking indignantly if he was not aware that this was the garden of a very high railway official. "But presently," I add, "when the lady found out her mistake, she was greatly distressed, and sent a bouquet of flowers to Tolstoy's carriage, praying to be forgiven."

Such are my purely defensive tactics. But I often judge it safer to protect myself by way of positive counter-attack. Sometimes, for example—but this is only when I am in a peevish mood—I reply by sketching in words or with a pencil the true hero as Bridget, I pretend, expects to see him, depicting, with but little regard to

justice, a figure not unlike the gentleman who must for ever be tying his tie in the advertisements. Or I assure her that long ago, before I was married, I knew plenty of heroes ; but that now . . .

“ Why, then, shouldn’t they come to see us now ? ” Bridget will ask. “ I am sure nobody could be more glad to see your friends than I am.”

“ Some of them,” I say, “ were killed in the war.”

“ But what about the others ? ” asks Bridget suspiciously.

At this point I escape from the argument, and—“ Imagine,” I say, “ what would happen if the Cabinet, in times of national emergency, instead of enrolling a new force of defence were to have a flash of inspiration at one of their meetings and decided to call out all the real heroes to take charge for ninety days. Picture those selected men creeping out of their laboratories, blinking as they dropped their pens, straightening themselves awkwardly as they tramped away from their mines or their farms. Would anyone, peeping through the railings to watch that company preparing their camp in Kensington Gardens, have any longer confidence in the Government ? ” And then we fall to wondering whether the heroes, thus collected, might not be sceptical about each other’s credentials, whether they would be able to work together, or would even like talking to each other. I take the view that some of them, at least, by twos and threes perhaps, would engage in prolonged converse, but that they would find co-operation very difficult.

Such are the reasonings that I adopt when Bridget blames me, directly or indirectly, for the prevailing dearth of heroes. But I confess that I develop these arguments with a certain discomfort. Sometimes I reflect that she sees the world as a serious and well-managed institution in which wealth and decorations are distributed with

unfailing justice by a Government which subjects to the eye of an all-seeing censorship the whole field of the activities of its Englishmen. And even so simple a faith as this I am ashamed to uproot without being able to replace it, feeling very like a thief when I see Bridget eyeing the crossing-sweeper with much less than her earlier confidence. At such moments I take a resolution to buy for the repair of her faith one of those red volumes which fulfil for heroes the same functions as are performed in the case of horses by a stud-book. But while I recognise that the Government have shown a wise liberality in choosing, without too rigid a criterion, those whose names and achievements should be included in such books, I am yet obliged annually to deplore that this very broadmindedness, when combined with the anxieties of the chosen that the architecture of their careers should not be hidden by mere ornament, makes these volumes altogether too costly for my pocket. Sometimes, too, when Bridget accuses me of having no heroes, I recall uneasily the famous description of the psychological valet, "for whom there are no heroes, not because they are not heroes, but because he is a valet."

Therefore I was glad when, coming home the other afternoon from the final match for the English Cup, tired from being pressed against an iron railing for more than four hours in unsettled weather, I was nevertheless able to tell Bridget that I had found at last an evident hero.

"And who may he be?" said Bridget.

"His name," said I, "is Dimmock."

"Dimmock?" said Bridget suspiciously.

"Yes, Dimmock," I said. "He plays football in a white and blue jersey; and when the ball comes near him, 50,000 people, with silver images of a strutting cock in their buttonholes, shout and swing rattles, while another 20,000 hold their breath in dismay. I saw him

shoot a goal this very afternoon, and I am surprised you didn't hear us cheering."

Now I thought that Bridget would be glad to know that I had found a man as distinctive as was Tamburlane, when he rode through Samarcanda's streets—a man whom 70,000 people, some in love and some in fear, recognised as a hero, directly they saw him step on to a muddy field. But, as usual, I was disappointed. Actually she said very little ; but I had a strange fancy, when we stepped out together to pick irises in our garden after the rain, that she looked about her in a precautionary manner, as though to be sure that there was no old man resting under our laburnum tree, in a sheepskin coat, perhaps, and shoes of lime-tree bark.

## THE STORM

IT was evening, and I was standing upon deck—homeward bound. We were running down the Baltic towards a dark mass of storm, against which a sailing ship, huddled and black, stood out upon our port bow, a blot darker than the storm. Above us the sky was broken into wan and fearful patches. The sea lay pallid and smooth ahead. But the smoke, as it fled from the funnels of our ship, cast a long, dark shadow upon the pale water. The waves that by day had leapt from her sides like children kissed in a game were tossed away now from her pre-occupied passage like outcasts thrust from shelter. Their white crests fell back, exiled and joyless, into the gathering darkness. A steamer's masthead light gleamed dimly on our starboard bow. Astern a distant lighthouse flashed timorously, as though appalled by the advancing storm. Its beam shone fainter and fainter ; and all the while our lighted ship moved like a sentenced creature, tremulously gay, towards the awaiting night.

I was coming from the troubled countries of Russia, and the scene before me fitted well to my thoughts. Less than a month before I had driven into Riga in the early hours of a summer's morning, after a night spent in the making of precarious peace between turbulent armies, and with the noise of the guns still in my ears. My first evening in the city had been broken by rifle shots and the bursting of grenades in the streets. I had been awakened on my first morning in the town to the sound of " *Die Wacht am Rhein* " played at the head of outgoing German troops. I had visited the prisons and

found in iron-barred cages pale and half-starved men and women, confined without written record of their faults, who had waited while day by day their fellows had been taken out to execution. There was a girl among them who herself had been taken out to death, but had been spared because that morning, by some clumsy accident, one over the appointed number had been led out to face the firing party. I was coming from a troubled country ; and rumours that had met us as we came down the Baltic showed that we were sailing also for an England full of ominous troubles and discontent.

A few days before, waiting for a ship, I had spent a morning bathing and lying in the sun on a sandy beach of the Baltic Sea, and as I and my companion lay there three small Lettish children had come stealing up to us through the rushes. The two little barefooted boys—Jan and Mik—had joined us boldly, and sat between us in the sun, eyeing our strange uniforms and our foreign ways. Their sister Anna had been less bold, and had held her distance, watching us shyly from the top of the bank at the foot of which we lay. But when we had finished lying in the sunlight she and her brothers had led us to the reed-thatched fisherman's hovel that was their home. The boys had given us water to drink out of their well, a few red currants from a bush beside it, and a sprig of scented herb, while Anna helped the old grandmother to pick over a lapful of thyme that was to be stored for the making of tea in the winter. It was a miserable cottage of two small and dark rooms. Three beds were crowded into one of them, and into the other a medley of fishing nets, cooking vessels, and household gear. A couple of tame rabbits were running about the floor. Only in the sandy scrap of garden outside a bunch of orange lilies were flaming as though in revolution against the mean poverty of the house.

Sitting by the cottage door I began to wonder about

the children whom I had left behind in England, and the small son who had so lately been born to me there. I had heard of the little Cuinchy dancing, as she would always dance if one played but the fewest notes of music, with Peaseblossom clumsily following her across the grasses of an English lawn. I could imagine their small brother, sleeping with his cheek upon his hand, unconscious of troubles present or to come, and I pictured how his small eyes would follow after the shining beads of a necklace of Baltic amber which I was taking home with me for Bridget, his mother. If neither I nor those poor Lettish peasants by whose house door I was sitting were destined to see a world made finally free for the tormented peoples of Europe, I could at least pray that the eyes of those small children, dipping their brown earthenware mug into the well by my side, the eyes of that little lad, born under a more fortunate star than they and now sleeping in the cot where Peaseblossom and the little Cuinchy had slept before him, might be brought to see the achievement of a freer and a happier world. And there came into my mind as I sat there the words of a poet sprung from the enemies of us both : " Our helm is set thitherwards where is our children's land. Thither, stormier than the sea, storms our great longing."

With these thoughts I fell asleep, and waking very early in the morning, looked out almost anxiously as though for a sign of what the future held. All about the ship was a glowing sheet of calm, sunlit water. I went up on deck and sat there till the sea had turned to a pale blue, lightly touched by the wind, till we had caught and passed and left far behind us a small and solitary white-sailed boat with a tranquil oar plying on its either side.

## THE GLIMPSE

I HAD just crossed Finland, travelling on my way home from the Estonian front near the Peipus Sea ; and as I sat in the cabin of a ship that was threading her difficult way through the ice-bound channels of the Aland Islands, a girl, apparently in the early twenties, wrapped in a long coat of wild-cat skin—white with black markings—came and sat down opposite me. Her curly hair was cut short about her head, and she was pale with the pallor which you may see this year in most of the town-dwelling women and children of Eastern Europe. But none of her fellow-passengers could overlook her beauty ; and I, at least, could not miss the charm of the Russian speech in which from time to time she addressed her companion. Both of us were writing, and it was more than an hour before, upon some chance question of hers, we came into conversation together. I found that she and her mother were freshly escaped from Petrograd, having driven forty miles and walked six through the snows of the Finnish frontier. Now she was coming to England to join a sister there, and probably to marry an Englishman. I helped the two of them, as best I could, through the difficulties of Scandinavian travel ; and several times, when her mother had gone to rest between stages of her journey, the girl and I explored the streets of foreign cities, and I listened to her stories of the life from which she had so lately escaped.

So the three of us travelled as companions, till the night came on which we were to strike the English coast. It had been an uneasy crossing, and most of us had kept

our berths. But towards evening the wind and the sea fell ; and when I went to find out if I could give her or her mother any help the girl asked me if I would take her on deck to see the first lights of England. I, too, had planned to watch for them, for we were heading straight for that line of Northumberland beaches which, out of all the beautiful counties of England, most often haunts me in foreign lands. So I promised to bear her company, if she woke ; and when, in the first morning hours, she knocked on my door we climbed together on to the deck and sat in shelter from the North Sea wind, watching the dim lights of England across the bows of our voyaging ship.

Then it was that she spoke most vividly of the life which she had left behind her. Little more than a year before she had gone by herself apart to live in a mountain cottage in the South of Russia. A very old peasant and his wife had looked after her, setting out for her each morning baskets of fruit for her daily bread ; and she had given herself up to wandering in the mountains, attended only by a great dog that was half a wolf, whom she had called upon once only to protect her from a band of wild gipsies. But with him she had strayed about the hillsides alone, climbing after flowers, lying and watching small animals at work among the rocks and leaves, collecting snakes and tortoises and bringing them home into her room, to the dismay of her aged hostess, who discussed with her whether she was not really a witch. She had made her room, she said, into a garden of changing wild flowers ; and there between her wanderings she had read a multitude of books. From time to time she had gone to stay with her sister in a neighbouring town ; and once, for several weeks, she had danced each night a solitary dance before the Bolsheviks in the local theatre, black-robed but for her red shoes, and won their applause and earned money to help pay for her journey back to Petro-

grad. For by now she had decided that her happy lonely life in the mountains must end and that she must go back to arrange her mother's escape to England.

Her friends told her that Petrograd was full of dangers and violence, and that in any case it was impossible for her to travel so far through Russia alone. But she had been determined to go, and so, in a long, delaying journey, had crossed the full length of Russia and joined her mother again. She told me much of that journey. One night her carriage had been so crowded that there was no room for anyone to climb unaided to the upper berth to sleep. A huge Russian peasant, without speaking a word, had lifted her up in his arms and set her down above the heads of them all to rest ; and she, before she slept, had struck a match that lighted up a crowd of ghastly, watching faces all round the carriage below her where she lay. On another day she had been almost the only passenger in the train, and a crowd of threatening Bolsheviks had approached her. But she, clutching her revolver, had talked to them for more than an hour of life and death and politics, till they, astonished at her strange speech, had gone away and left her unmolested. Once again, at an unlit railway junction, the porters had come into her carriage by night and taken away her luggage. But she had pursued them and joined her fellow-travellers with her ; and so, jumping under railway trucks in the dark, she and her company had caught up the robbers and carried her belongings triumphantly back. Three times in the course of her journey she had been formally asked in marriage—once by a doctor travelling homeward from an Austrian prison, who on her refusal had wept bitterly. But at length, after many days' journey, she had come, protected, like Una, by her own single heart, safely to her mother's house.

In Petrograd she had set herself to secure their escape, realising that their money could not last them for many

months longer. She had been stricken with typhus, and while still weak had walked the long tramless streets of Petrograd in search of permits that would allow her to cross the frontier. All her family had told her that she would kill her mother if she took her away. Once again she had danced before the Bolsheviks—great lovers, she said, of the theatre—in a parody, this time, of the ballet. But at length she had got into touch with one of the secret organisations which, for a price, will convey refugees across the frontier ; and so, after six months' waiting, she and her mother, leaving Petrograd itself with only a small basket, by virtue of some permit to go and seek food, had escaped across the frontier and come safely to Helsingfors.

By this time the Longstone light was flashing clear in the darkness ahead of us. The girl ceased her story, and we sat side by side in silence, while the ship ploughed through the falling sea towards the land that now for both of us was home. She, I think, was wondering what lay ahead of her beyond those firm, shining signals. But I was still under the spell of her talk, looking backwards, as through a window momentarily discovered, into the voiceless and perplexing shadows of Russia.

## THE NIGHT OF ST. JOHN

IN the Baltic countries the Eve of St. John is a festival that plainly goes back farther into time than the celebration of the saint whose name it bears. For St. John's Day is also Midsummer Day ; and on that night over a wide stretch of country it is the immemorial custom of the peasants, gathering together in little companies, to light beacons on the hill-tops and to rejoice far into the morning with dancing and feasting and the singing of ancient songs.

It is called the Night of St. John ; but in Livonia, at least, there is but little night in midsummer. I was travelling there this year ; and when at midnight I turned aside from the great Petrograd road, with my eyes on a little moon not far risen above the horizon, there was still a wide red sky glowing behind me in the west, and it was still twilight as I walked across a field and climbed a sandy knoll set with birch trees, on the top of which a fire was already blazing. The lopped trunk of a fir tree some twenty feet high had been set in the ground at the centre of this little hill, and in a cauldron fastened to the head of it a fire of wood was alight. There was no one attending it as I breasted the knoll, and I stood there alone for a time, while other answering fires sprang out from the hills near and far, till I could count a full ten of them gleaming across the dark, wide country. And while I watched and counted them, walking round the fire that blazed above my head, the voices of singing also came to me across the meadows, choruses that rose and fell upon the wind, here dying and there taken up afresh,

the words indistinguishable but the tune perpetually the same.

Presently an old woman and two young girls climbed the mound at the foot of the beacon. A little girl came up with them, and almost at once two men and then a couple of boys with a dog joined them. The little girl stood shyly alone, apart from them all ; but the old woman and her two companions placed themselves together opposite the fire ; and the flickering light, falling on their white-scarved heads, gave them an air of reverence, almost as though they had been standing before the Cross. The boys challenged them to sing, and at last the old woman, in a high cracked voice, broke into a chant of invitation, of which the burden was “Come lasses and lads.” Meantime the men and boys together made up the fire. One of them lit a torch from it and, climbing a birch tree, set it all flaring among the topmost branches, a light set higher than the beacon for a signal to the countryside. And presently from among the snatches of distant singing that were borne haphazard on the wind one chorus singled itself out and grew quickly clearer, till we could make out the white head-dresses of girls moving across the field below us. They came in singing procession to a cottage at the foot of the hill, and there waited to be rewarded, an old man told us, with a supper of cheese. Two young girls ran down the hill to meet the oncoming company ; and while we waited one of the boys pulled down a young birch tree and, breaking off its top, wound it in a wreath about his head. And then the visiting company of singers was mounting the hill towards us, and out of the dark came a line of chanting girls, arm-in-arm and garlanded with flowers. They came up the side of the knoll, and on the top all the company joined together and sang, with a young girl leading them, a variant of the universal chant, of which these in English are the words :

*Johnnie was sitting on the little hill.*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*  
*On his shoulders he held a load of hay.*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*  
*“ Come down, Johnnie, come down.*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*  
*Give your hay to my little calves.”*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*

One of the girls went apart with a country boy, and for a while swung high, swung low, beneath the branch of a tall tree. Before the war, an old man said, the night had been a true festival, with singing and dancing and plenty to eat and drink. To-night, without food or drink on the hill, was a pale reflection of the old days. Yet the girls went on singing happily :

*Good evening, mother of John,*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*  
*Did you expect the children of John ?*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*  
*His children are wet to the skin,*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*  
*Gathering St. John’s wort.*  
*Lihgo ! Lihgo !*

The little moon had sunk into the clouds. In an hour the dawn would begin. As I left the hill they broke into a renewed chorus ; and from north and south, uplifted on the gusty wind, the same chant followed me through the night the length of the great high road.

## THE BALTIC SEA

MY first pilgrimage into the Baltic ended at Reval. I had come up from Danzig in a destroyer ; and at Libau, since there was ice ahead and destroyers are too frail to be risked among ice, I changed into an "oiler" and went on slowly northwards. The sky, I remember, touched with pennons of cloud, was reflected in the lightly tumbling water. There was a misty sun, sinking slowly into the sea ahead of us, and astern, over Libau, as slowly rising, a great moon of the palest gold. All night we seemed to be crossing its pathway, crossing yet never passing that broad silver band of tranquil, moving water that for ever tumbled past us into the darkness, driven by the freezing wind. At morning, twenty-five miles from Reval, somewhere off the coast that Alfred the Great sent Wulfstan more than a thousand years ago to explore, we first met the ice. Neither I nor the crew had ever looked on a frozen sea before, and we gathered in the bows to watch. I imagine that those who are held for long in ice-bound waters pray constantly for the spring ; but the first voyage through an ice-field is an enchanting adventure. The prow of our ship sent flying fragments scudding to right and left across the surface of the ice. It broke away great white slabs that sank to pale green beneath the frozen sea. Astern a broken track of silver light led to the wintry sun. We passed where the ice was lit by it to pale blue and green and gave way to ice-locked pools of deep azure water. We passed at the distance of a hand's-throw a seal that flopped into the water as we went by, leaving a cream-coloured baby with black

eyes staring at a world in which everything was still as strange to it as our grinding, travelling ship. At night, with Nargen to port, the moon threw to us across the ice a straight, untroubled strip of gold. Thus for the first time I came to Reval.

Since that first entry I have sailed the Baltic from time to time, and I have often watched it from the low, tideless beaches of Estonia and Lettland. The memories of my travel have mostly the deck of a destroyer for background —the balanced bodies of men moving to and fro on a windy day with quick runs and sudden halts ; the captain on the bridge turning from time to time to pore over the chart ; the signalman behind him waiting for orders. Below in the captain's cabin a faint vibration of the engines, a faint rattling of loose doors ; sun filtering in through the scuttles, and everywhere clean paint, clean brasswork, and electric lights burning.

Of the sea itself I have a gallery of sketches in my mind. I remember one Christmas beating down the Baltic from Reval towards Copenhagen through a night and a day of cloudy storm. I remember leaving Copenhagen for Danzig on a February afternoon, when the world was all drawn as with a pencil. The tracings of the faint breeze on the sea, the grey figures of ships and fishing boats to northward, the cloud of smoke hanging over a distant steamer, the greyness of the destroyer herself, broken only by splashes of polished brass and by the ruddy face of a boy here and there among her crew—all seemed part of a pencilled picture. I remember picnicking one summer evening on an island in a river of Estonia and at sunset dropping downstream to the Baltic in a whaler, one of a company of bare-throated men. I dipped my hand as we went, to catch and release the little fish that rose to the surface by our boat and stayed as though to watch us. We crossed the river bar where the salmon nets were drying on the beach, where a Baltic more still

than the moving river received us. And, as we drifted home, the sun threw a bar of light towards us across the sea, that met and suddenly darkened the sail of a fishing boat, before it was itself overtaken and captured by the night. I remember the Baltic as a sheet of gay and dazzling water alive with the sun of an early June morning. I remember it upon a night of March as a mass of sullenly attacking waters, when, with a rattling and grinding that shook the ship, our helm was put sharply down to avoid by yards a fishing boat, in which two sleepy and frightened men with upturned faces stood waving a hurriedly lit flare towards our deck. I remember a view of a distant grey fleet in the Gulf of Riga that flashed each moment with the discharge of guns, and of a distant shore where shells struck and burst among German troops at Dünamünde.

All these memories, I suppose, could be matched and surpassed by the thoughts of other men, gathered in other and more distant seas. Perhaps it is because I have come to know both its coasts and its waters that I picture the Baltic as the true sea, neither limitless like an ocean nor bounded like a lake; passionate sometimes and unaccountable of temper, hard and inhospitable during the months of ice, but in the long luminous days of the northern summer pleasant and familiar in its peace.

## AN ENGLISH SPRING

WHENEVER, as a child, I went on a railway journey, I was always supplied with a comic paper, illustrated in colours ; and I well remember that the number which accompanied me on my Easter holidays never failed to show a poet, biting his pen and running his fingers through his long hair, in the pursuit of thoughts and rhymes appropriate to his annual ode upon the spring. I never despised that poor poet, though I often felt sorry for him, if only because of the domestic annoyances by which in my picture he was generally distracted. But nowadays I pity him no more. If I were, or could ever think myself to be a poet, I should glory in such a challenge, devising, I am sure, in spite of disturbances, a new poem in honour of each returning spring. And I should seek in my verses no strange or recondite effects, but should be content, if I could but set down, April after April, a different aspect of that lovely time. Perhaps not even a different aspect ; for no small part of its loveliness derives from a familiarity which recalls each spring from “ hiding-places ten years deep ” the shy spirit of the heart.

Everyone recognises the beauty of the spring, and few but must have asked themselves, however lazily, to what that special loveliness is due. I would not try to discover all its secrets. It is enough to know that it is a delight common to all creatures that have eyes. No labour of men or women has gone to its provision, and none is deprived by its enjoyment. There is no temptation in it. Unlike the beauty of summer, rich with the

fruits of the year, there is about it nothing that can be seized or possessed. It shares with the autumn that highest quality of loveliness, that it beckons the beholder to something beyond itself ; but whereas autumn is grave with the warnings of winter and deprivation, spring is gay with a happier promise. It shares, too, with all revisiting loveliness for us of this generation a peculiar significance. None, I think, save the little children, watching this April in England the approach of the sweet and reticent spring, but felt himself often trustee for the untimely dead of a beauty which their eyes had no longer the vision to appraise.

For seven returning springs I seemed to have been in exile. One of them I chiefly remembered for the lilac bushes that were flowering about the doors of French farmhouses when the attack before Festubert opened in 1915. Others had left no memorial with me but a recollection of black-stemmed almond trees releasing a pale and foreign beauty to the incredulous London sky. And for the last two years I had been parted by a thousand miles from England, and April had come chiefly to mean for me the movement of ice in the gulfs of the Baltic ; the breaking of ice in Baltic rivers and its powerful and delirious passage to the sea ; the sight of birch trees coming to delicate leaf, and of the vivid green of the sprouting rye. But for me, in those limitless plains that stretched far away into Russia, something of the intimacy of spring had been lost. This year I travelled lately along the coast from Dorset to Cornwall, and was free to enjoy, always at leisure and often in solitude, the spring in England again.

One evening in the course of my pilgrimage I lay, soon after sunset, by a knotted blackthorn over a deserted beach, watching, as each wave advanced from the dark seas massed behind it, the glint of the moon upon its breaking crest. And this, my fancy told me, was a

parable of the beauty which a man, watching quietly for it to befall, may find gleaming upon the waters of his own memory. Looking back upon my journey, I see again the grey morning lustre upon the dark woods of holm oak at Abbotsbury ; a lawn upon the uttermost edge of a cliff above the deep blue Cornish sea, starred with primroses and quick with their magical scent ; a cove where I lay in the sun, on a bed of grey and white pebbles, while the shining ribbons of brown seaweed swayed in the water at my feet ; little harbours suddenly discovered at nightfall

Where deep and low the hamlets lie  
Beneath their little patch of sky  
And little lot of stars.

I remember a still afternoon when I sat by a pool, its bright waters divided by sharp rushes, and talked to a fisherman weaving crab-pots out of green rods. On the one side the land sloped up towards the sinking sun, a pasture dotted with spent grey thistles yielding to a dark and naked plough, where the straining horses went slowly upwards with bowing heads and on the bright rim of the hill turned and came as slowly down. A quarry in the side of the valley was deep in flowering gorse. The stone walls that divided the fields were black with shadow, and between them ran lightly upwards the wavering silver line of a hedge still bare of leaves. To my left hand nothing moved, save the ploughing horses and the occasional shadow of a gull passing slowly over the meadow ; but the old man beside me twisted his green rods in and out, and beyond him the shining sea moved perpetually, while here and there, across a girdle of pale blue water that lay about the beach, the brown-sailed boats returned from their fishing.

But most vividly of all there comes back to me a morning in which spring and winter seemed still to be entangled.

Perhaps it was a day nearer to the true idea of an English spring than the sunlit calm which had preceded it, to the spirit of that "dark land" as Carinthia saw it when first she looked upon the English coast. It may be that my earlier memories are chiefly of northern seas and sands, where the colours are paler and the delicate and more distant sky is seldom free from cloud. It may be, too, that morning of rough weather chimed better in harmony with a world still visibly in tumult. Certain, at any rate, it is that in all the beautiful pageant which engaged me on my journey that stormy vision struck swiftest to the heart. It was a day of difficult, intangible beauty. A powerful wind was blowing from the north and all the world was in movement. The grey, marching clouds, divided for a moment, would discover glimpses of a sky withdrawn, and with their passage all the colours of the sea were changing, pale greens and blues surrendering to a graver blue, a deeper shining green. Flashes of a disturbing white quivered and vanished; and somewhere among them a solitary fishing-boat, flying before the wind, showed small and dark on the face of the travelling waters. All this I saw as I peered to windward, while the grass bents tugged about my feet and the bushes of yellow gorse upon the hill trembled. And then I turned and, face to the morning sun, looked down from that steep headland on a wide, invading splendour, silver pouring upon slate, the magnificent flood of a nobly threatening sea.

## A SUMMER'S MEMORIAL

WAS ever a summer like this in England ? True that for several summers I had been away from England and that even before I went into exile I had come to see only the London summer and not the English summer at all. True also that this year I spent one of the loveliest months in a bay that I discovered for myself by a spring-time pilgrimage along the south coast. Perhaps, therefore, I may not be completely acquitted of that pleasant folly which led some men, as Plutarch tells, to think that there was a finer moon at Athens than at Corinth. And yet—was ever such a summer in England as this ?

The pleasures of experience, I think, are of two kinds. There is the delight which comes from the sharing of labour and observation among comrades, and of that joy I had this summer my full measure. We would go down to the beach of a morning and wade barefoot by our boat into the edges of the tide. For hours we would pull about the bay, watching lest the wind should drive in the ocean swell upon us, staring across a calm, clouded sea for a sight of that troubling of the waters which marks the hunting shoal, resting now and then upon our oars to watch the last desperate plunge of a gleaming fish before it was lifte safely over the side of the boat and tossed to join its green and silver fellows in the stern. And at evening, as we hauled our boat up across the shingle, we would turn our eyes where to east and west the dark headlands lay brooding over a pale grey shining water that the night robbed of its lustre till sea and sky were one.

But if there is joy to be found in the sharing of labour, there is a separate virtue in secret and lonely apprehension ; and it is the way of my thoughts, when I unleash them into the past, to flush oftenest the memories of solitary experience. That is true, at least, of this bygone summer, with which I became, as it were, a fellow-pilgrim through all the twenty-four hours. For I laid a fishing line upon the beach, not far above the level of low water, which I must visit at each ebbing of the tide lest my catch should be gnawed by crabs or devoured by seagulls ; and this need, as the tides changed, took me to the beach at every hour of the day and night in turn. It is the nights I chiefly remember. I would cross the sands towards midnight, when the white cliffs rose like mist above a sea that streamed outwards from the track of the moon to dark waters most faintly touched with blue. The sands about me would be pale with moonshine, save for the dark tangles of seaweed left by the ebbing tide, the dark shadows that ran to and fro in the valleys of the ribbed sand. I would come at last to the water's edge, and there, lowering my fork from my shoulder, set to work digging for bait. There were nights when, for all my digging, no living creature stirred ; but there were other nights when every stroke of my fork tossed out the silver fish upon the sand, light spirits for one moment a-dance in gleaming and petulant beauty and in the next by the dull sand devoured. Or I would wake just before morning and lie drowsy for a while, listening to the screaming chorus of gulls that fed by the margin of the sea ; and then I would rise and go downstairs and stand watching, framed in my open door, the dark sorrels standing austerely in a field grey with dew, and above them Venus and the light sickle of a moon, and beyond them, far away upon the rim of the hill, the slow brightening of the dawn.

There is, I know, little enough in such memories to

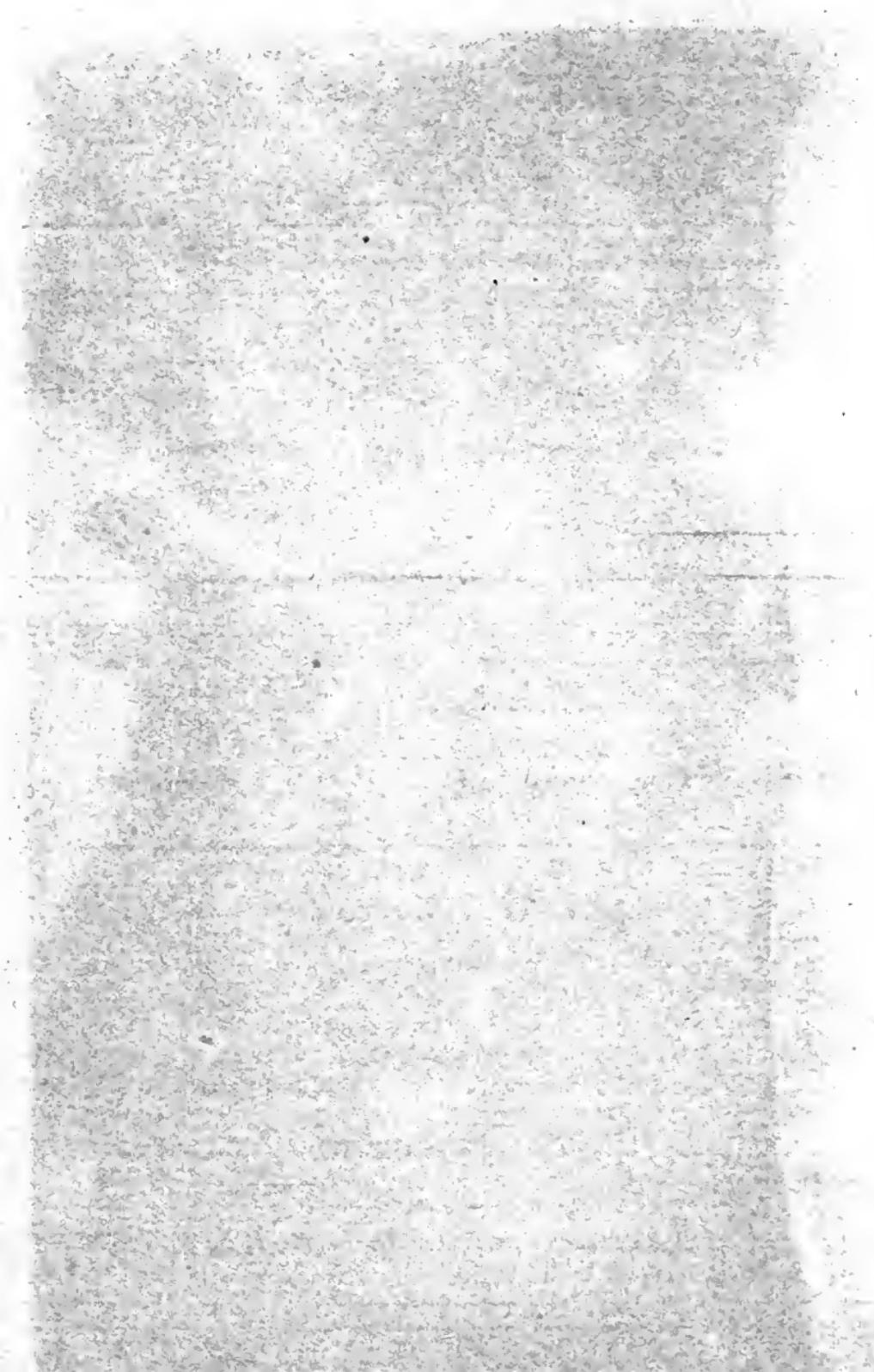
distinguish them from those of other bygone summers, and it is chance, perhaps, that has made them for me the tokens of so wonderful a season. They help at least to bring back to me a summer whose praise, surely, will rest long upon the lips of men. And yet, watching but to-day upon an October afternoon the winds of autumn driving home their attack upon the still magnificent and unbroken year, I could but wish to myself that some epitaph more tangible than words might yet mark its splendour and its passage. I have sometimes thought that the finest memorial for men nobly dead would be a forest of fruit trees, almonds and cherries, apple trees and pears, in which the poorest might set a tree in honour of his own folk, whither rich and poor together each spring might make their pilgrimage. Such a forest, I told myself then, would be a fitting memorial for the summer now dying. And I had passed on to wonder whether, after all, this lovely summer might not have prepared secretly its own memorial in England—by changes, perhaps, in her birds and flowers, even in the very flesh and blood of her people,—when a grim thought entered like an alien among those pleasant imaginings. Had not this same cloudless summer, which had brought such happiness to England, laid, but a few days' journey thence, in hunger and in death the foundations of its own memorial ?

There came suddenly into my mind with fresh and dreadful meaning words which I had learned by heart as a little boy at school—“ The chastisement of our peace is upon him and with his stripes we are healed.” I remembered an outpost of peasant lads, conscripts of the Russian army, seated little more than a year ago over their fire by the frontiers of Russia, and telling me of the long time that was passed since they had seen the fields of their home. I thought of others, not less real to me than those—of Natasha, standing on a tub in the conservatory to kiss Boris, before she darted away and

stood with hanging head among the flowers ; of Levin with his dog Laska, waiting in the silent wood till Venus should have risen over the birch trees, when the snipe came and he and his companion fired together ; of the little boys in Turgenev's story, tending their drove of horses through the night upon the prairie and startled, as they told each other stories of spirits, by the splash of pike in the river below them, by the mournful cries of curlew and heron. I knew them for creatures not merely of like passions with myself, but of loves and thoughts, labours and fantasies not greatly different from those that I found commonly about me in the men and women of England. And for a moment I seemed to see, as it might have been in one of Blake's drawings, the generation of men now alive at the last gathering of the peoples, a trembling flock upon God's left hand—"Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred ? . . ."

Printed in Great Britain at  
*The Mayflower Press, Plymouth.*  
William Brendon & Son, Ltd.





54869

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A 000 689 357 2

